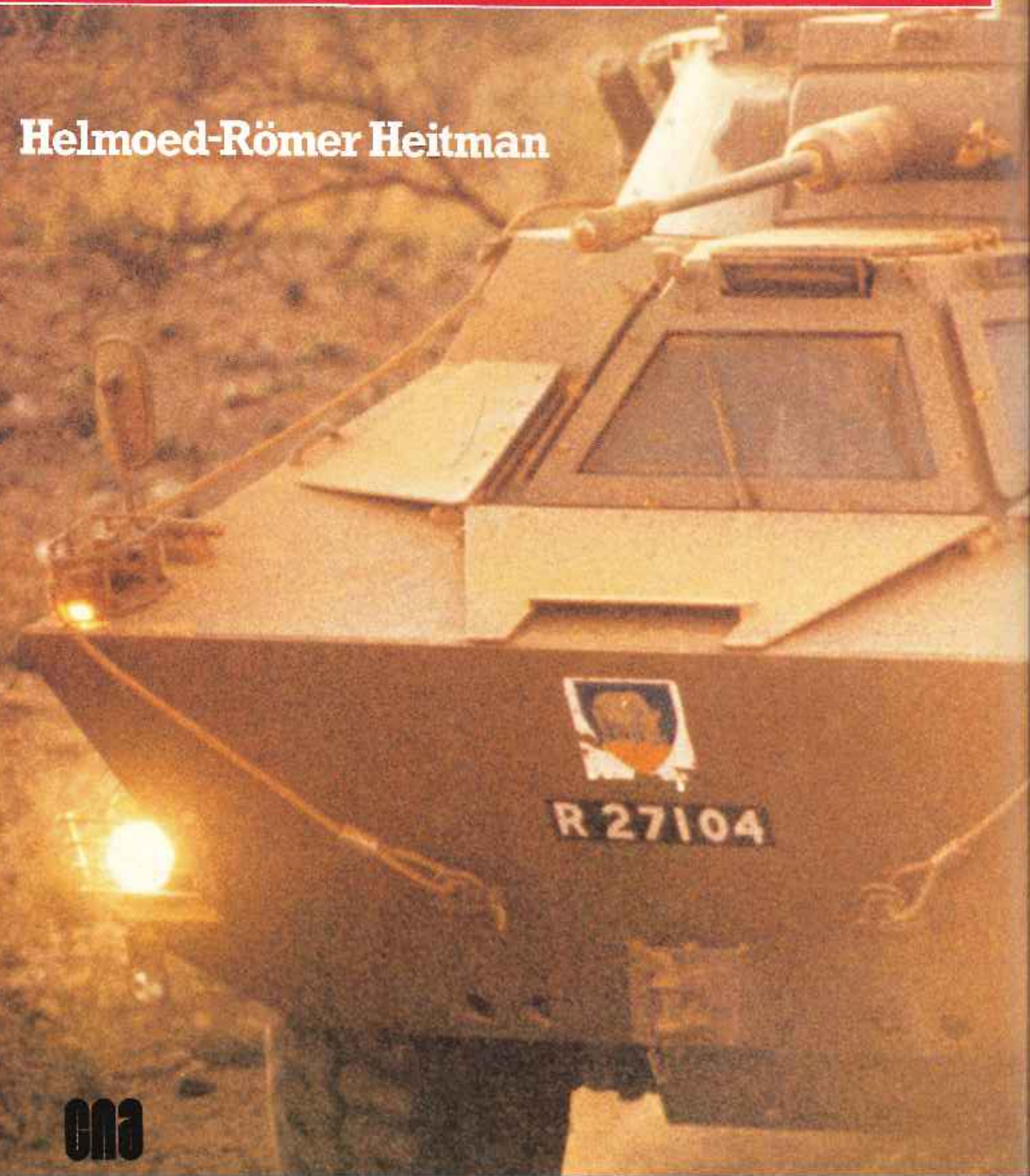


# SOUTH AFRICAN WAR MACHINE

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*Page 1: A patrol pictured during counterinsurgency training in the northern Cape.*

*Page 2-3: Ratel 20 armoured car.*

*Below: An Alouette helicopter moves into a guarded landing zone.*



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE TODAY	20
THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARMY	28
THE SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE	48
THE SOUTH AFRICAN NAVY	72
SPECIAL FORCES	94
RELATED FORCES	114
ARMSCOR	120
INSURGENCY IN SOUTH-WEST AFRICA	134
INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA	166
ANTI-TERRORIST OPERATIONS	176
OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE	182
INDEX	190
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	192
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	192





A black and white photograph showing a military scene in a desert. In the background, there are several military vehicles, including what appear to be armored cars or light tanks. A person in military uniform is standing near one of the vehicles on the left. Another person is visible near a vehicle on the right. The foreground is dominated by a large, dark, cylindrical object, possibly a piece of equipment or a vehicle component, which is partially obscured by the text. The overall scene suggests a military operation or a display of military hardware in a field environment.

# **INSURGENCY IN SOUTH-WEST AFRICA**



The origins of the insurgency now plaguing parts of northern SWA go back to 1957 and to Cape Town – some 2200 kilometres south of the troubled area. That year the Owambo Peoples' Congress was founded in Cape Town by one Herman Toivo ja Toivo, a former railways policeman who had recently been released after serving a prison sentence in connection with his later activities. Several of his advisers and mentors of that period were self-declared members of the South African Communist Party, which may have served to set the scene for current events. The new organisation was renamed Owambo People's Organisation in 1959; in June 1960 it adopted the name South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in an effort to disguise its tribal character.

While this did succeed in misleading several foreign backers, the name change proved less efficacious within SWA. One

reason for this no doubt lies in the continuing mistrust felt by many of the other population groups toward the Owambos – not a little helped along by the attitude of many Owambos toward members of the smaller groups. Thus SWAPO has remained essentially an Owambo organisation, although individuals from other groups have joined over the years and, in some cases, have been placed in senior posts. The probable proportions are reflected in the fact that almost 95% of captured or killed insurgents are Owambos. A young Dama recruit captured during a cross-border operation by security forces told his interviewers that he was happy to be clear of SWAPO because he was 'unhappy with the racism in the training camp,' which is a telling commentary.

One group did commit itself fully to SWAPO: The Caprivi African National

Union (CANU), which merged with SWAPO in 1964. Today, many of CANU's leaders find themselves imprisoned in host countries after a purge by the SWAPO leadership. This followed indications – including a letter to the Chief Minister of Caprivi – that CANU intended to break away from SWAPO and re-enter the constitutional process. Other purges have removed most of SWAPO's early and most prominent members, several of whom have returned to SWA in recent years to re-enter legitimate politics.

SWAPO based its platform chiefly on dissatisfaction among the Owambos with both the migrant labour system and the system for electing headmen. On this basis SWAPO campaigned for independence from South Africa – which controls the territory under a League of Nations 'C' Mandate – and for the introduction of a national-level 'one man, one vote' system

*Previous page: Part of the mechanised force preparing for its attack on the 'Vietnam' base near Chetaquera in southern Angola during Operation Reindeer in May 1978, the first major cross-border operation since the 1975 incursion.*





of government. The fact that the demographic realities of SWA would then inevitably result in Owambo hegemony was – tactfully – not mentioned. Also glossed over to this day is the fact that the 'C' Mandates made no provision for the future independence of the territories concerned because they were considered unlikely ever to be viable as countries.

Despite some political success, several of the new party's leaders left SWA in the early 1960s to prosecute their aims from abroad. Among these was Sam Nujoma, who feared arrest for his involvement in the instigation of a riot at Windhoek. Once established overseas, SWAPO decided on 'armed revolution' as the means towards their end and announced this in 1963, forming a military wing – the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) – for this purpose.



Above: Political education plays a major part in the training of FAPLA officers as the posters on the walls of this classroom show.

Below: A mass briefing for troops before the start of an operation in 1980.







Above: A Ratel damaged in a minefield and by FAPLA tank attacks is nonetheless recovered.

Recruiting proved disappointingly slow, and SWAPO soon had to resort to the tried and trusted ploy of offering scholarships tenable in the United States and England in an effort to attract young Owambos. Some 900 recruits were obtained by this method at the time, and it remains in use today. The recruits were flown from Botswana or Zambia to Tanzania, where they were taken to a camp north-west of Dar es Salaam for basic training – the nature of which must have come as a rude shock. Those selected for advanced or specialised training were then sent on to other countries, including Algeria, China, Cuba, Egypt, North Korea and the Soviet Union.

The first six armed insurgents entered Owambo – one of the northern regions of SWA – during September 1965. In subse-

quent months, they moved around the region spreading their message and seeking out likely recruits. Some thirty young Owambos received rudimentary training at several temporary camps during this period, after which most were sent back to their homes to await instructions. Despite the insurgents' best efforts to maintain security, word of their activities reached the police and set in train an intensive intelligence-gathering effort.

Their current camp was finally discovered by a team of police who had spent several weeks moving through the general area disguised as a roadworks party, following up information received from members of the local population. On 26 August 1966, after a period of surveillance, a small heliborne police force raided the camp. Two insurgents were killed and nine captured in the ensuing skirmish. Several others were arrested later after identification by local people.

Meanwhile terrorism had been initiated by a second group of ten insurgents, who plundered two trading stores near the Angolan/SWA border in February 1966. Their navigational skills had proved somewhat shaky, however, as both shops were on the Angolan side of the border. The two shopkeepers, a Portuguese and an Owambo, were murdered. This group then broke up, but three of the insurgents were apprehended by members of the local population near Rundu in Kavango – east of Owambo – some time later and handed over to the police.

July 1966 saw a third group of ten insurgents enter Owambo to begin operations. Among the incidents that followed were the shooting-up of the border village of Oshikango in September, several attacks on Owambo headmen and an attack on a farm in the Grootfontein district – immediately south of Owambo – in December. That same month the fourth group of eight PLAN insurgents arrived in Owambo. In 1967 there were similar terrorist incidents, as well as armed propaganda activity, more intensive recruiting attempts and the expansion of the insurgency into Caprivi, the eastward-reaching finger of SWA between Botswana and Zambia. This opened in March





with the ambush of a police patrol in western Caprivi that resulted in the arrest of almost all of the ambush part.

After this inauspicious start, PLAN suffered a new setback in May when their 'supreme commander,' Tobias Hanyeko, was killed in an exchange of fire on a passenger barge along the Caprivi shore of the Zambezi. Police had boarded the barge for a routine check and recognised him. Two policemen were seriously injured in this incident, of whom one was blinded and the other died two years later of the after-effects. The following ten months brought a series of greater or lesser disasters for the insurgents, 160 having been arrested and two killed in clashes with police counterinsurgency elements by March 1968. That April, in fact, saw the police withdraw their counterinsurgency personnel from Owambo in view of the peaceful conditions then prevailing.

As it turned out, this withdrawal was premature, although Owambo did remain peaceful for some months thereafter. During October, however, two large groups of insurgents entered Owambo and reopened PLAN's campaign, necessitating the renewed deployment of counterinsurgency elements to the

region. While PLAN could claim this as a success of sorts, their change to the employment of large groups was anything but that: no fewer than 56 of the insurgents were arrested within a week of their arrival in the region. As one result, PLAN reverted to its earlier system of operating in small groups. By the turn of the year, however, personnel losses had reached unacceptable levels and, together with the continuing hostility of much of their own tribal base – the Owambo – had forced a virtual halt to the insurgents' operations. This lull lasted throughout 1969 and 1970 with insurgent activity picking up again in 1971, concentrated chiefly on the sporadic laying of mines.

During this period the insurgents also became something of a nuisance in Zambia, indulging in a variety of excesses which finally led the local police to seize their weapons on several occasions. The first of the many mine incidents that northern SWA has suffered came in May 1971, when a police vehicle detonated an anti-vehicle mine near Katima Mulilo in the eastern Caprivi. Further mine incidents – and casualties, both police and civilian – followed sporadically.

By 1973 the insurgents had recovered from their earlier setbacks and renewed



Above: Local leaders often carry arms or employ bodyguards for personal protection.  
Below: Collecting weapons and equipment including anti-aircraft machine guns in the Smokeshell base complex.







their activities, stepping up pressure on the local population and – particularly in Caprivi – setting the occasional ambush for police patrols. The first intimation of this new vigour came in January of that year, when a police camp was subjected to a brief bombardment from several recoilless rifles before the attackers, having taken some casualties to return

fire, withdrew back into Zambia. When the pressure continued to grow, responsibility for the counterinsurgency effort was passed over to the Army, which had the necessary manpower.

The degree to which armed propaganda and intimidation had done their work in Owambo became clear when PLAN succeeded in enforcing a SWAPO-

declared boycott of the 1973 general elections in the region: a poll of only 2.7% was recorded. A similar attempt in 1975 proved less successful, and a 55% poll was recorded. This was quickly countered by SWAPO in the form of stepped-up terrorism, one victim being the Chief Minister of Owambo.

Between the two events had come the beginning of the Portuguese collapse in Angola, resulting in the first large-scale deployment of South African troops in northern SWA. This severely restricted PLAN's freedom of action for a time, although a measure of low-key armed propaganda and 'soft intimidation' could not be prevented. The insurgents' position was weakened further with the beginning of Operation Savannah, the South African intervention in Angola during the latter part of 1975.

During this intervention, substantial elements of PLAN were forced to go 'underground' in those parts of southern Angola which they had just come to regard as safe staging areas for operations against Owambo. Insurgents who

*Above left: Buffets at Xangongo being prepared for the pull-out back to SWA.*

*Below: Army vehicles in Xangongo, known in former times as Vila Rocadas.*





did succeed in entering Owambo during this period concentrated mainly on more or less spectacular activity in an effort to retain media attention. It was hoped that this would both convince foreign backers of the insurgency's vitality and, via the local press and word of mouth, balance out the reduced presence in Owambo. Losses during this period were painful.

Overall, however, developments in Angola have proved highly advantageous for PLAN. Instead of having to infiltrate Owambo by way of Caprivi and the hostile Kavango or, alternatively, having to penetrate a hostile Portuguese-controlled Angola, the insurgents now enjoy direct access to their tribal base. This advantage is even greater than it might appear at first sight in that numerous Owambos live in Southern Angola - separated from their kin only by a line drawn across featureless bush in one of the many unfortunate border decisions of the colonial era. Thus social and minor commercial cross-border traffic is a reality that facilitates infiltrations and hampers the security forces.

Then, too, the open support that SWAPO receives from the MPLA government in Angola goes a long way toward eliminating many of the previous problems. PLAN can now maintain a compre-

hensive network of training camps and forward staging base-areas while sharing parts of FAPLA's logistic system. Access to Soviet and other aid is much easier and movement is simplified by the existence of parallel Soviet - supporting FAPLA and PLAN - and Cuban supply systems. The greater stability in PLAN's training system has also allowed for increasingly effective use of various advisers, instructors and specialists, some of whom may well be shared with FAPLA. Finally, FAPLA appears quite happy to allow at least some of PLAN's bases to 'hug' its own so as to reduce the danger of attack by security forces.

One countervailing result of develop-

ments in Angola, apparently, is that PLAN, euphoric at gaining direct access to Owambo, temporarily neglected its effort in Caprivi. This gave ample opportunity to the security forces and Caprivi authorities, allowing greater emphasis on civic action projects and a speeding-up of civilian development programmes. At the same time, the remaining insurgents were neutralised or driven from the region by vigorous security force action - increasingly aided by the local population as the

*Below: A civilian car after a mine explosion. Civilian vehicles suffer far more seriously than those of the army because of the high standards of mine protection that virtually every army vehicle incorporates.*







threat of reprisals faded. This same confidence among the local population also hindered renewed attempts at infiltration.

Faced with rapidly declining effectiveness in Caprivi, PLAN apparently decided to stage a major publicity exercise – both to regain a measure of prestige within Caprivi and to bolster its faltering image in the eyes of its foreign backers and its Zambian hosts. This operation finally took the form of several 122mm rockets fired at the base at Katima Mulilo in August 1979. Ten soldiers were killed when the barrack hut in which they were sleeping was hit by the only effective rocket.

The security forces reacted with an

*Left: Political posters are routinely found in SWAPO camps whenever they are raided by the security forces*

*Below: Buffels in a densely bushed part of northern Owambo. The open top of the Buffel can make life uncomfortable for its passengers in such terrain.*





immediate follow-up operation that inflicted some casualties. Shortly thereafter, a major raid was mounted against PLAN bases in south-western Zambia, whence the rocketeers had come. This, PLAN decided not to contest, avoiding contact almost entirely. Nevertheless, they suffered additional damage to their local image – in both Caprivi and Zambia – and to morale. PLAN has made no serious attempt to reopen operations in Caprivi since.

With Caprivi virtually restabilised, only Owambo remains as an active operational area. Kaokoland, in north-west SWA, has experienced incidents of mine-laying and murder as well as some intimidation along the border with Angola. There have also been cases in which insurgent groups used this region as a route to the south and to outflank security forces in Owambo. Overall, however, this area, too, has



Above: A T-34/85 captured in its hide during Operation Protea.

remained relatively quiet – perhaps because it is too thinly populated to be of much interest to SWAPO. In any event, the Himba population – essentially Herero – is not generally well disposed toward the Owambos.

Kavango – between Owambo and Caprivi – has long been hostile to the Owambo-dominated SWAPO and its insurgency. Not only does it enjoy considerable development and stability, Kavango also has the contrasting examples of the now-peaceful Caprivi and the terrorism-racked Owambo on either side. Then too, Kavango is host to a large number of refugees from south-eastern Angola, many of whom have bitter memories of PLAN excesses during operations in support of FAPLA against Unita insurgents. Thus, despite some more or less legal SWAPO activity, occasional subversion of local government officials and increasing expansion of operations from eastern Owambo into western Kavango, most infiltrations have been promptly reported to the security forces for counteraction. However, this has not deterred PLAN from ongoing attempts to 'activate' Kavango.

Elements of the security forces remain stationed in both regions as a precaution. Much of their time is devoted to a variety of civic-action and development programmes, with emphasis on providing the materials and specialised knowledge for a broad spectrum of self-help projects. Naturally, they also spend time patrolling and doing general intelligence/counter-intelligence work. Both Kaokoland and Kavango do remain highly vulnerable to terrorist incursions from Angola, because their populations are largely concentrated very near the rivers that form their

respective boundaries with Angola. As a result, PLAN's recent operations in these areas should perhaps be seen not as a serious attempt to open new fronts, but as reminders to the local population of their vulnerability.

PLAN's attempts to open operations south of Owambo have been sporadic and not particularly successful. These operations are conducted by PLAN's 'special forces' elements, known by the code names Typhoon and Volcano. The pattern has been for a small group of insurgents to move south through the very sparsely populated eastern Owambo during the rainy season, when surface water is available to them and contributes to the heavier bush that renders tracking and detection more difficult. Once arrived in the farming districts immediately south of Owambo, they have generally concentrated on attacking isolated farms and sabotaging the railway line.

On occasion, these forays have had embarrassing results: in one case a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl drove off an attack after her father had been killed in the opening flurry of fire. She killed one of the insurgents and wounded another, who was later finished off by his compatriots. The most recent of these operations have involved rather larger groups, but have otherwise differed little from their predecessors except in requiring a greater effort on the part of security forces. Exceptions to the norm have been such isolated incidents of urban terrorism as bombs in Windhoek and Swakopmund and the assassination of the widely respected Herero leader Clemens Kapuuo







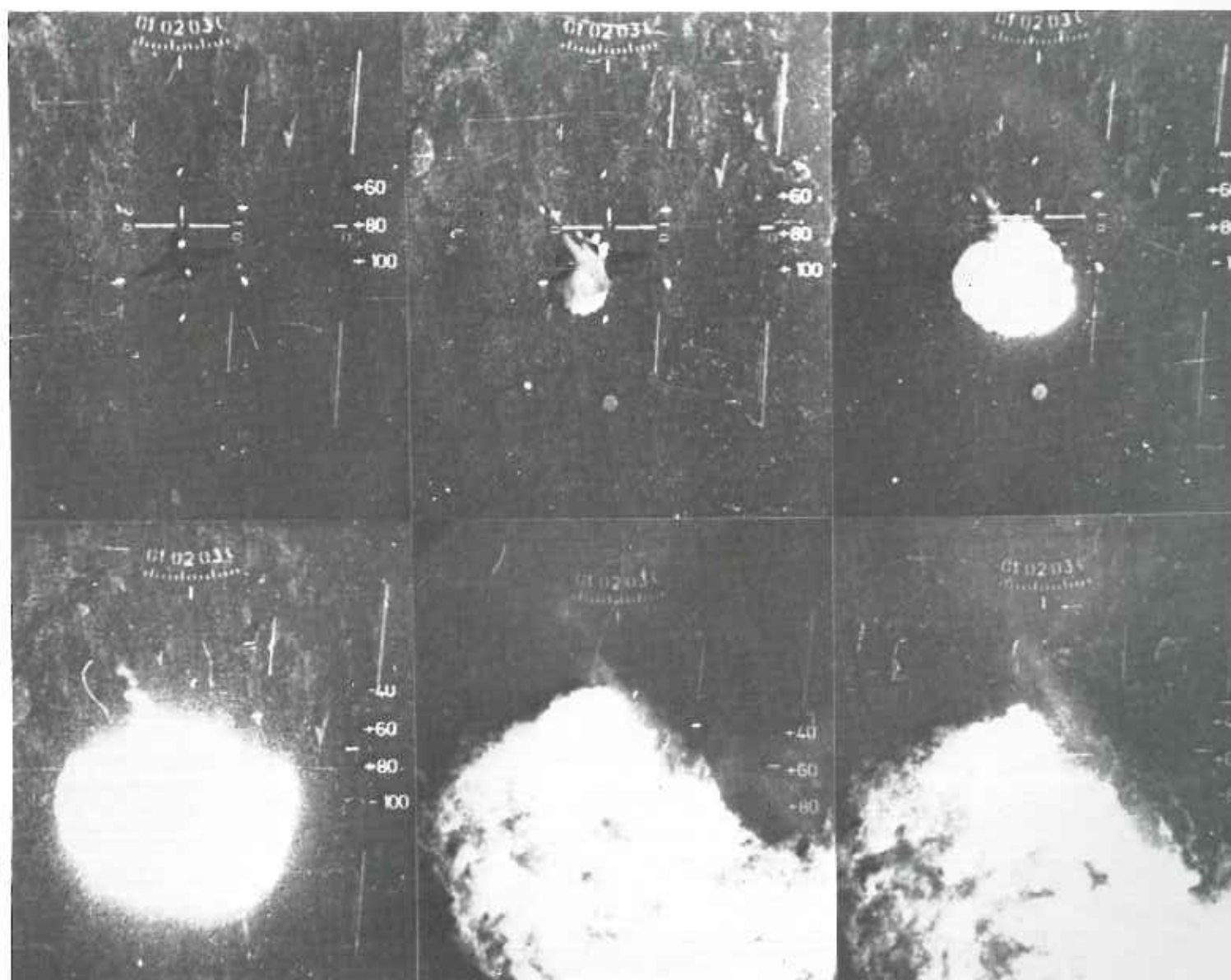


While the 'Smokeshell' base area had not been ideally sited tactically – difficult to achieve, in any case, in flat and bushy terrain – it had been thoroughly prepared for defence. Earth and log bunkers, slit trenches and fighting holes were plentiful. The defence itself was apparently quite spirited once the initial surprise had been overcome, with the light anti-aircraft guns – 14.5mm single and 23mm twin – proving especially troublesome in the ground defence role. One ZU-23-2 succeeded in knocking out several Ratels before being silenced.

The attack went in after a brief artillery preparation on identified targets. Three mechanised groups swept through the target area on a roughly east-west axis, thereby largely avoiding the defences, oriented to the south. The sheer size of the base area – some 65 sq kms – dictated that the infantry remain mounted throughout



Right: A destroyed 14.5mm anti-aircraft machine gun in the Smokeshell complex. These weapons also proved troublesome in the ground role.  
Below: A dramatic sequence of gun camera photos taken by a SAAP aircraft during the shooting down of a MiG on 5 October 1982.





## SOUTH-WEST AFRICA TERRITORY FORCE (SWATF)

The SWATF was established on 1 August 1980 as the basis of a future independent South-West African defence force. It remains under SADF operational control for the present; the General Officer Commanding SWATF doubles as SWA Secretary for Defence and OC SWA Command, the latter being an SADF post exercising command over South African forces and the counterinsurgency operations in northern SWA. Budgetary control falls to the SWA authorities, and all administration, national service matters, training and purchasing are SWATF matters. National service for all males has been proclaimed but is only applied selectively, both to avoid potential political problems arising from the insurgency situation and to avoid overloading the limited training facilities. At present, the SWATF provides some 30 percent of the troops in the Operational Area.

The SWATF is structurally similar to the SADF in that it is militia-based and has both an area-bound counterinsurgency element (Area Force) and a mobile conventional warfare element (Reaction Force). SWA is also divided into seven Sectors with functions similar to the Commands in South Africa. The three sectors covering the Operational Area (10 - Kaokoland and Owambo; 20 - Kavango Bushmanland and West Caprivi; and 70 - East Caprivi) remain under SADF control for the time being. The remaining four Sectors (30 - HQ at Otjiwarongo; 40 - HQ at Windhoek; 50 - HQ at Gobabis; 60 - HQ at Keetmanshoop) are commanded by SWATF officers.

The Area Force is essentially similar to the SA Commando system. The 26 Area Force Units vary widely in strength and composition, being tailored to suit their particular responsibilities. They fall under the Sector headquarters for command and administrative purposes. The



Above: Like the SADF the SWATF places great stress on fitness with physical training being an important part of the day-to-day routine.

Reaction Force comprises a CF Motorised Brigade - which includes one standing battalion - and six standing regional light infantry battalions manned by volunteers. These are counterinsurgency units whereas the Brigade has a primary conventional role, although its elements also do duty in the Operational Area. Other elements include a specialised follow-up unit and a light aviation squadron. The regional battalions handle their own basic training while other troops are still given their initial training by the SADF at Walvis Bay. A Military School at Okanhandja conducts advanced courses.

Below: 701 Bn troops practicing with light machine guns. 701 is raised locally in East Caprivi and provides security for that area as well as sending elements to the Operational Area.



the assault, debussing from their Buffels and Ratels only to deal with determined dug-in opposition. Particularly stubborn strongpoints were subdued with the aid of both direct (Eland-90, Ratel-20 and Ratel-90) and indirect fire (mortars, 140mm guns). Some close air support was also available, consisting chiefly of Impala Mk IIs firing cannon and rockets.

The operation's extended phase proved both tedious and time-consuming, with objectives widely scattered and well concealed. It was speeded up to some extent by deploying helicopters to move infantry among the various base areas to reduce strongpoints as they were located, leaving the bulk of the mechanised elements free to continue sweeping the area. Other infantry searched the subdued base areas, mopping up and collecting documents and equipment.

This phase also brought two clashes with semi-mechanised PLAN columns which were apparently attempting to conduct a reconnaissance in force. One was detected as it entered the area, the other on attempting to slip away without making contact. Both were fixed by air attacks until ground forces could reach and destroy them. Several BRDM-2 scout cars and BTR-152 APCs were captured or destroyed in these engagements, as were a number of trucks. During the withdrawal phase, a mechanised FAPLA force clashed with one of the raiding elements, engaging it with both direct and indirect fire. This necessitated a brief counter-attack with air support before a clean break could be achieved. The only other FAPLA involvement came when a SAAF helicopter strayed too near one of their camps and was shot down: the pilot made his way back to friendly lines on foot despite a back injury and some hair-raising adventures en route. Contacts with local civilians were few, most apparently having heeded the pamphlets dropped before the operation calling on them to keep clear. Those who were encountered were given food - a valuable commodity in Angola today - and any necessary medical treatment.

The next such operation Protea, in August 1981 - was rather more complicated in that combined PLAN and FAPLA forces were encountered throughout. Also, FAPLA had assured the local population that there was no danger and had prevented them from leaving the area of the PLAN establishments that were the raid's objectives. By then, too, the new Cuban- and East German-installed air-defence system had become operational and warned PLAN of potentially dangerous air movements.

Operation Protea followed onto a series of foot-mobile search-and-destroy operations against the PLAN infrastructure in southern Angola east of an imaginary line drawn through Ongiva (formerly Ferreira de Eca). One of these operations - Carna-



tion – actually continued in tandem with Protea. Although none of these operations had brought any clashes with FAPLA, despite an occasional approach to within a few hundred meters of their positions, the planning for Protea had to accept such contact as a distinct possibility: west of the imaginary line, PLAN and FAPLA facilities and logistics were so closely intertwined as to be virtually inseparable. The situation was complicated by PLAN standing orders that required their personnel to wear FAPLA uniform in or near towns.

Preceded by an air strike on the radar installation at Cahama – some 130 km inside Angola – Protea opened in the early hours of 24 August, when a mechanised force crossed the Cunene River near Ruacana. This force then moved rapidly northward along the western bank of the river to the area of Humbe, where it took up blocking positions to cover the operation against possible interference from the Cahama area and to prevent the escape of any PLAN elements along this route.

A second mechanised force moved from Ondangwa during the night, arriving just south of Xangongo (formerly Vila Rocadas) – 70 km north of the border – around 0900 hours. One element of this force moved farther north to guard against interference by FAPLA elements stationed at Peu Peu, some 20 km to the north-east. Other elements were de-



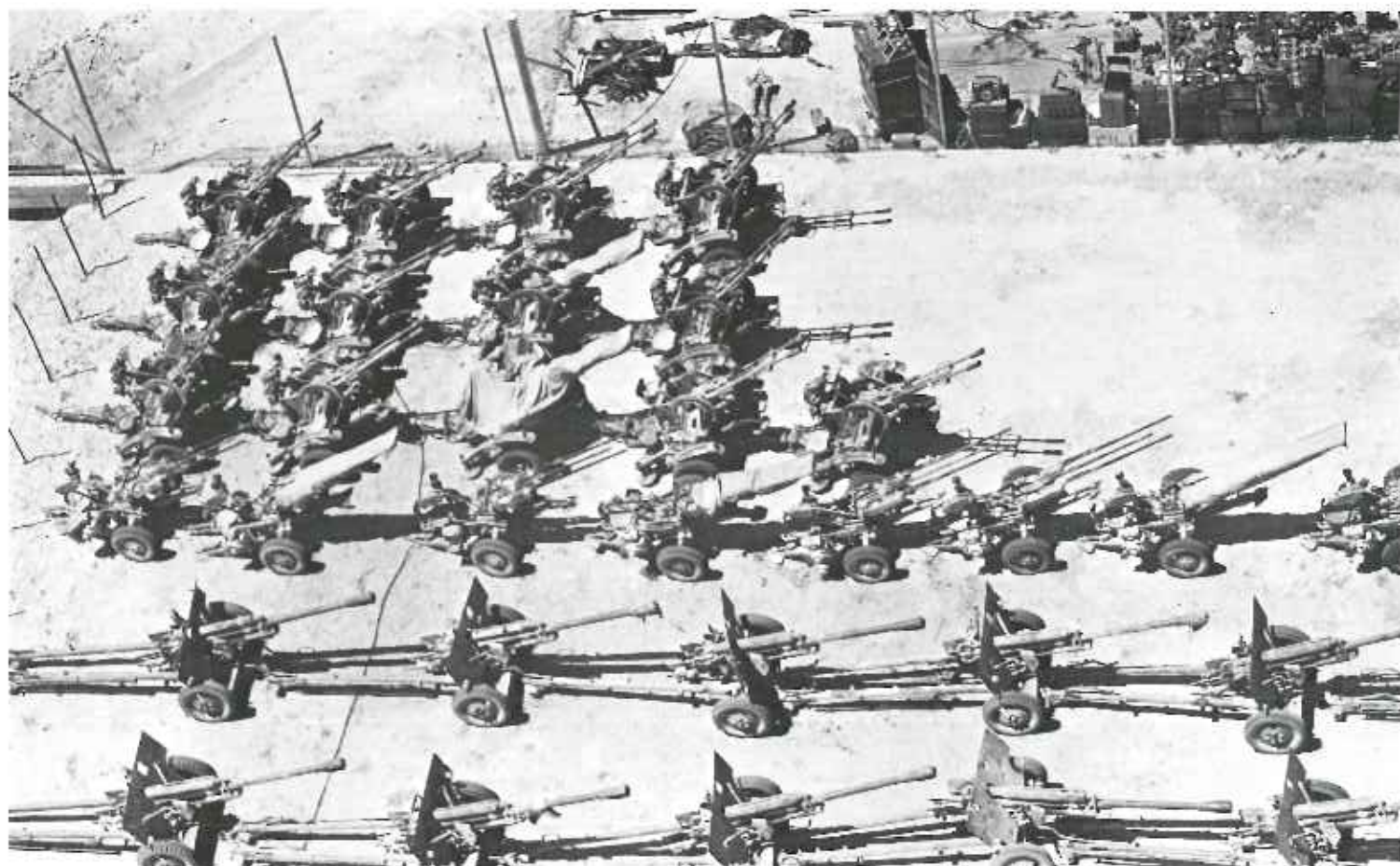
*Above:* A few of the captured trucks parked at Ondangwa prior to disposal.

tached to deal with PLAN camps south and south-east of Xangongo.

At Xangongo, the site of PLAN's North-Western Front HQ, the main body found a mixed PLAN/FAPLA force dug in on the southern outskirts. This defence was disrupted in a brief but vigorous action, followed by several hours of mopping up remaining defences in and around the town. During this activity, a convoy of more than 60 GAZ-66 trucks was encountered and captured in the town. Most of

these trucks were loaded with a variety of supplies, but some had 20mm anti-aircraft cannon mounted on their load beds, a few of which put up a brief fight before being silenced by the Ratels. Two T-34/85s were also encountered during the fighting and were destroyed by Ratel-90s. Meanwhile, the detached element covering against Peu Peu fought off a short attack by

*Below:* Captured guns including Soviet-made 76mm field guns and twin 23mm anti-aircraft guns and Yugoslav triple 20mm anti-aircraft machine guns.





FAPLA armour and infantry trying to break through toward Xangongo.

Once Xangongo had been secured and it was clear that covering forces could handle any interference, the main body of the raiding force took the road toward its next objective, Ongiva, which was the site of PLAN's Northern Front HQ. The detached elements continued their area operations around Xangongo, searching out and destroying PLAN camps and collecting arms, ammunition and equipment for destruction or transport back to SWA. Light relief included a football match against the local Xangongo team, which the raiders won two-nil.

The main body met some resistance near Mongua - 40 kilometers east of

Xangongo - on the 25th. Here a mechanised FAPLA force with artillery support attempted to stop the advance toward Ongiva. This resistance was quickly broken down, although one helicopter was lost in the process. Ongiva was reached on the 26th.

Here the raiding force encountered another mixed PLAN/FAPLA force deployed to defend the town. Comprising armour and infantry and enjoying some artillery support, this force appears to have put up a spirited resistance before Ongiva fell during the afternoon of the 28th. Nine tanks were destroyed in the fighting. At one stage a column of some 25 vehicles attempted to depart the area but ran into a blocking group north of the

town. Ignoring calls to identify itself, parts of the column then tried to outflank the blocking position. Most of the column - which turned out to be FAPLA - was then destroyed in the air attacks called down upon it. Several Soviet personnel were killed in this incident, and a warrant officer was captured.

With Ongiva taken, the raiding force set about destroying local PLAN facilities and then began withdrawing back to SWA. The covering force and the detached elements around Xangongo followed suit, the last elements of the raiding force having been released by 1 September, marking the end of Operation Protea. The foot-mobile operation to the east was then wound up, and these troops completed





their withdrawal by the 8th. It is estimated that Protea inflicted some 1000 fatal casualties on the combined PLAN and FAPLA forces involved. Security-force losses amounted to 10 killed. Among the PLAN casualties were the Deputy Commander in Chief and the Deputy for Political Affairs, both of whom were killed, and the Artillery Commander, who was captured.

Captured materiel amounted to between 3000 and 4000 tonnes, of which some 2000 tonnes was taken back to SWA for study and evaluation. This included eight T-34/85 tanks, three PT-76 reconnaissance tanks, three BRDM-2 scout cars, one BM-21 122mm multiple rocket launcher, twenty-four ZIS-3 76mm field guns, sixteen ZU-23-2 23mm and fourteen Yugoslav M-56 20mm triple-barrel anti-aircraft guns, plus 200 assorted trucks. These included various versions of UAZ-469s, GAZ-66s, URAL-375s, ZIL-131s and



*Above:* Initial interrogation of a captured insurgent. The prisoner's face is blacked out because he has since been resettled and might be endangered if identified more closely.

*Main picture:* Railways Police in Buffels escorting a truck convoy to Oshakati.

*Bottom:* Still more captured equipment, this time D30 122mm howitzers, taken during Operation Askari.







*Above:* A building in Chitade formerly used by SWAPO is blown up in August 1980.

*Right:* An Eland-90 armoured car section on patrol in central Owambo.

KrAZ-219s. The materiel destroyed in situ included more than 300 tonnes of various types of ammunition.

The next major external operation, code-named Daisy, followed in November 1981, partly as a result of intelligence gleaned during Protea and from the evaluation of documents seized in that operation. Daisy saw the deepest penetration into Angola since the South African intervention in 1975, Operation Savannah. Daisy's primary objectives were a PLAN HQ at Bambi and a base area in the vicinity of Cheraquera.

Daisy opened on 1 November with a mechanised force crossing the border and moving on Ionde, some 120 km inside Angola. An old Portuguese trading post with an airstrip, Ionde, had been chosen as the site of the tactical HQ which was set up while the main force moved farther north toward Bambi and Cheraquera. The latter was attacked on the 4th after an initial air strike by a mixed force of Mirages, Canberras and Buccaneers. Once the objectives had been secured, infantry carried out area operations in their vicinity. The operation wound down, and the raiding force withdrew on the 20th.

While FAPLA did generally stay clear of the forces involved in Daisy, their air force conducted a number of demonstrations toward the general area of the operation. During one of these, a clash with SAAF Mirages resulted in the shooting down of a MiG-21. Coming as it did not long after extensive FAPLA involvement in support of PLAN during Protea, this





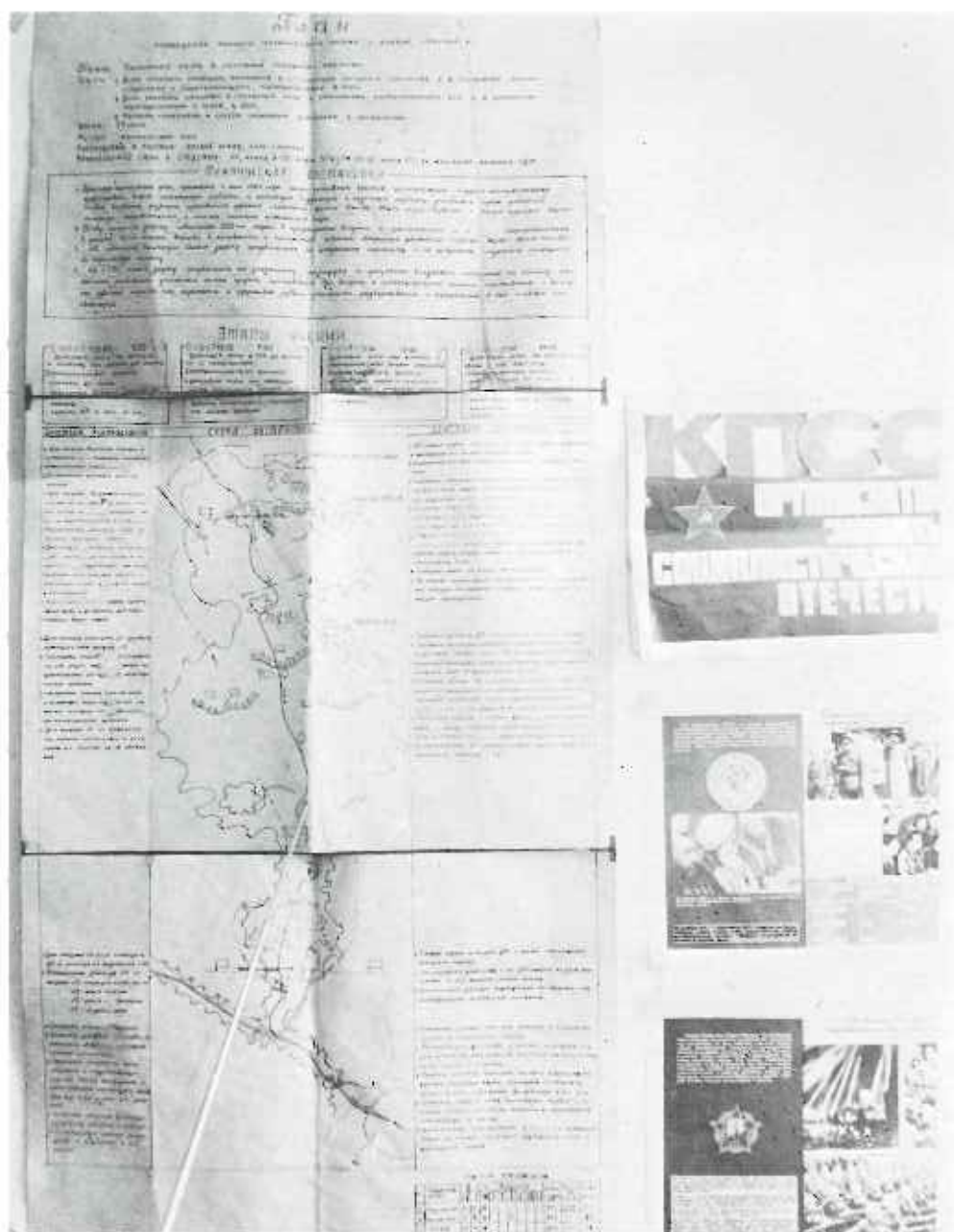
incident gave rise to considerable concern for the future. Since then, another MiG-21 has been shot down (October 1982) after four MiGs had engaged two Mirage F-1s escorting a Canberra on a reconnaissance mission.

The sixth large-scale cross-border operation came only in December 1983. Intelligence had begun to indicate that PLAN intended a larger-than-usual rainy season campaign for early 1984, which was confirmed in the course of November. Indicators supporting this intelligence included the withdrawal of insurgents for retraining, stepped up PLAN reconnaissance activity and the pre-positioning of caches on the intended axes. The training of special forces elements intended for operations south of Owambo had also been stepped up. Available intelligence was augmented by reconnaissance flights and also by long-range reconnaissance patrols - some as small as two men - operating quite deeply into Angola.

Several of the reconnaissance flights drew fire from the Angolan air-defences, including the first firings of SA-8s and SA-9s in this theatre. Initial confirmation of the employment of SA-9s came when an Impala Mk II returned from a reconnaissance mission over the Cahama area with an SA-9 warhead stuck in its tail. A complete SA-9 system was later captured near Cuvelai. S-60 57mm guns were also encountered for the first time in any numbers. Several air-defence suppression missions were then flown in areas where an active air-defence could have prejudiced the success of the overall operation. Interestingly, artillery was also used against some of the air-defence sites. One such case saw an artillery element with a covering force approach to within range of the air-defences around Cahama and engage them.

Operation Askari itself got under way around the 6th of December, when additional reconnaissance parties and patrols were despatched to develop hard information on which the security forces could act in order to pre-empt the intended PLAN offensive. Combat elements were sent in as the situation developed, including four mechanised combat groups of around 500 men each and some smaller infantry forces which chiefly operated closer to the border. While the mechanised elements were intended to hit specific hard targets, the infantry conducted routine search-and-destroy area operations.

Initially, there had been some thought of hitting one of the large PLAN training camps deep inside Angola, where many of the insurgents earmarked for the forthcoming incursion were under training. This concept was shelved when, toward the end of December, intelligence was received that seven companies of insurgents (between 800 and 1000 men) had been offloaded from heavy military



trucks near Jamba and had indicated to fellow PLAN personnel there that they would be moving south. This was obviously the beginning of the expected offensive and operations were adjusted accordingly, emphasis being placed on the area south and east of Jamba.

The major aspect of Operation Askari was the disruption of the PLAN logistic infrastructure and command and control system by air and ground attacks on various bases and headquarters. The HQ near Lubango was also attacked by four aircraft as a reminder of its vulnerability and to create doubt as to whether it might not also become a target for ground forces. Another major part of the operation was wide and deep reconnaissance to locate PLAN elements which could then be engaged and destroyed. High priority was also accorded the location of pre-positioned supply caches and their destruction or removal. Finally, strenuous efforts were made throughout to isolate any PLAN elements from nearby FAPLA or Cuban forces.

Above: Documents captured during Operation Askari - an operational plan for the defence of Cuvelai written in Russian and then translated into Portuguese.

Despite this, there were several clashes with FAPLA elements during the operation. The first came in the vicinity of the small town of Caiundo, when a reconnaissance element was ambushed by FAPLA forces. Another small clash came when FAPLA forces stationed at Mulonde came to the support of PLAN elements in Quiteve when these were attacked. The FAPLA garrison of Cahama also sortied out to cover the withdrawal into that town of some 200 insurgents when their nearby camp came under attack. Most of the PLAN elements that were encountered during Askari attempted to seek shelter with FAPLA and most were, in fact, accorded protection.

The most serious incident occurred on 3 January when FAPLA's 11th Brigade was reinforced with two Cuban battalions and engaged one of the mechanised combat groups near Cuvelai. This had been deal-





ing with a PLAN tactical HQ and base area some five kilometres to the north-east of that town. A heated action followed, during which the Cuban/FAPLA force suffered some 324 fatal casualties and lost 11 T-54 tanks. Most of the 21 fatal casualties suffered by the security forces during Askari were incurred in this clash. The biggest single loss occurred when a Ratel-

*Below:* Chief of the SADF, General Viljoen, gives a press briefing on the course of Operation Askari. The map shows SWAPO infiltration routes.

20 became enmeshed in a minefield and was knocked out by a T-54, five of the crew being killed.

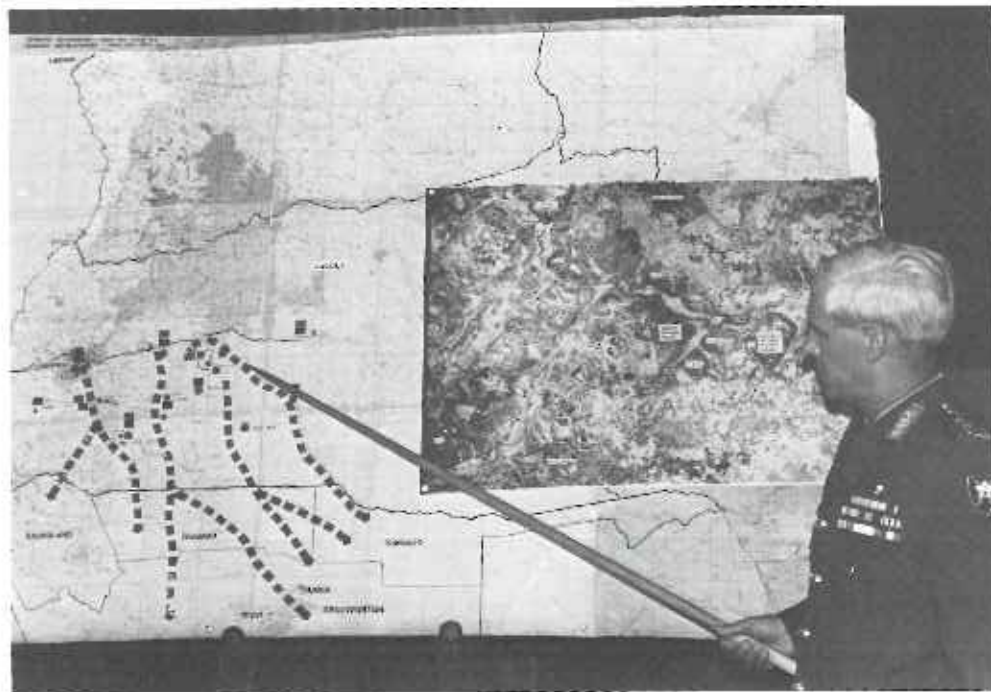
Askari was wound up around 13 January. The actual withdrawal of forces involved was complicated by heavy rains, which had turned many of the roads and tracks into mud trails and flooded the many streams that had to be crossed. The last combat group out had to build an improvised log bridge over a tributary of the Cuvelai River – not an easy task when some of the vehicles weighed over 20

*Above:* The last unit to withdraw during Operation Askari was briefly trapped by floods but built an improvised bridge rather than wait for engineering support.

tonnes. Another hazard was that of landmines on the tracks and roads, which often slowed the withdrawal to the walking pace of the sweep teams.

While Askari did not succeed in inflicting as many casualties on PLAN as some previous operations, it did cause severe disruption of the insurgents' logistic back-up and thereby was judged successful. Then too, Askari served to demonstrate to FAPLA that intervention, even with superior forces and armour, could be an expensive and unproductive exercise. Askari also produced some interesting information on just how dependent FAPLA is on Soviet assistance. Among the many documents taken at Cuvelai was an operations order for the battle prepared for the Angolan commander by a Soviet adviser – written in Russian and translated into Portuguese.

Apart from these – by local standards – large-scale external operations, the security forces have also conducted numerous smaller-scale ones. The commonest and most typical of these have resulted from the 'hot pursuit' of an insurgent group after a contact, or from follow-up on a contact, reported incident or spoor or acting on information received. Long range reconnaissance patrols and reconnaissance patrols and sweeps nearer the border, have also been conducted regularly in an effort to keep





an eye on PLAN activities and intentions. On occasion, minor sweeps and raids have moved out to exploit intelligence while it is still fresh. Hot pursuit and follow-up operations have naturally been carried out most often by troops involved in the initial contact or by the nearest reaction force.

Many of the less immediate external operations have fallen to 32 Battalion. This unusual unit was formed in 1976 and includes many former Angolans who chose exile rather than a life under the Marxist MPLA regime. Most of these are also former members of the FNLA, one of the other two insurgent movements that had fought the Portuguese and then lost out to the MPLA after the Portuguese collapse. Among those who know the business, 32 Bn is widely regarded as the premier light infantry unit in the world today. It is also employed in more routine operations, but 32 has specialised in searching out and destroying PLAN's forward camps and base areas.

Typically, such an operation would follow on location of a PLAN camp by a reconnaissance patrol acting on the report of an earlier team or intelligence gained from prisoners, evaluation of captured documents and the local population. Later patrols then develop this information to establish all possible details on the proposed target and the surrounding area. Finally, they may also act as security and stopper groups during the actual attack on the camp. This will usually be conducted by elements of 32 Bn in strength that varies with the size of the target. An objective too large for an infantry assault would be handed off to a mechanised force, with 32 providing the intelligence and guidance.

While insertion and extraction of 32 Bn elements is usually by helicopter, most of their operations are conducted on foot.

*Right: Pastor Cornelius Ndjoba, former Chief Minister of Owambo, was killed in 1983 when the pick up in which he was driving hit a landmine. Below: A Ratel 60 crew cleaning up after an action during Operation Askari.*







Above: A casualty from a mine incident being rushed to treatment by a medical team.

They are largely occupied with extensive foot-mobile patrols and sweeps, on which the troops involved spend days at a time in the bush with only occasional resupply by helicopter. It is this unremitting reconnaissance effort that has gained 32 the information and local expertise for its highly successful operations. With many relatively small groups on the ground in southern Angola, often for lengthy periods, 32 is also rather dependent on the goodwill of the local civilian population for its security as well as for much of its information.

Another style of minor 'external' is well

illustrated by Operation Klipkop. This raid followed various incidents of mine-laying and other terrorism in the Kaokoland, and the rocketing of Ruacana in late July 1980. Intelligence had earlier identified the nearby small Angolan village of Chitado as a PLAN transit point with a small tactical HQ and supply depot. Insurgents were generally brought as far as Chitado in light trucks and received final instructions from the local HQ, as well as drawing the bulk of their heavier stores – such as landmines – from the depot. Some groups would also return to Chitado for resupply and a brief break in the course of their activities.

A considerable degree of correlation had, in fact, been established between PLAN activity in Chitado and the recent

events in the Kaokoland. Accordingly, it was decided to destroy the PLAN facility in Chitado. The assault was carried out by a two-platoon force of infantry, which was heli-landed just outside the village on 2 August. A brisk thirty-minute sweep through the village dealt with the opposition, whereafter the intelligence and demolition teams went to work. The infantry, meanwhile, cleared the nearby airfield and also swept an arena within a three-kilometer radius of Chitado. The buildings used by PLAN were then destroyed and the force extracted.

Operation Super (March 1982) was similar in concept. In this case 45 men of 32 Bn were dropped by helicopter some two km from a PLAN camp near Cambeno in south-western Angola at around 0800 hours on the 13th, sweeping through the camp and surrounding area in an eight-hour action. Fire support was provided by a mortar group dropped on a nearby hill by other helicopters. Stopper groups were inserted on likely escape routes and dealt with any insurgents who attempted to decamp. Control proved difficult as a result of the hilly terrain and often heavy bush and was handled for much of the operation by the senior helicopter pilot; others spotted for the mortars and also kept him informed of any ground movements out of his immediate vision. Over 200 insurgents were killed for the loss of three members of the raiding party, and large quantities of stores were captured, putting back a planned offensive in the Kaokoland by many months.

A rather more ambitious operation followed in July and August of 1982 with the aim of destroying PLAN's Central and Eastern Front headquarters. Operation Mebos turned into a frustrating game of hide-and-seek, with PLAN HQs moving every time they had been located by







large quantity of stores. This included some 1000 landmines which would otherwise have wreaked havoc among the unprotected civilian motorists of Owambo. In all, about 345 insurgents were killed and some captured for the loss of 29 members of the security forces. This rather high total resulted from the largest single loss of any operation when a Puma was downed on 12 August, killing all three crew and twelve troops aboard.

The attack at Mupa was, arguably, the most valuable part of the operation, as the secretary to the Eastern Front commander had left his departure a little late. He was killed as he attempted to get into his vehicle and escape, many revealing

*Left:* The then Chief of the Army, General Viljoen, with members of Combat Group 61 during the Operations against the Smokeshell complex.

special forces patrols: thus each attack resulted in the infliction of few casualties. Finally, the Eastern Front HQ was located in the Mupa area and hit quickly by one of the Reconnaissance Commandos before it could be moved again. Even so, the attack came only just in time, as most of the senior personnel had already decamped. Further attacks on its new locations followed until the operation was terminated, having thoroughly disrupted the PLAN command and control system for some time to come.

Apart from its disruptive effects, Mebos also produced much valuable intelligence and allowed seizure and destruction of a



*Right:* Paras clearing houses in Cassinga after taking the town during the fighting in 1978.

*Below:* The Cassinga area photographed from one of the last Pumas to leave the area. The pilot, Major Church, was decorated for his last flight over the by then enemy-occupied town to check no one was left behind.







Above: Pumas lifting the Paras out of Cassinga at the conclusion of the raid. The first enemy armour reached the landing zone as the last helicopter left.

documents being found in his briefcase and in his office. Among these were the minutes of a meeting held at the PLAN HQ near Lubango on 15 June, at which instructions had been issued that all of the 'puppets' in SWA should be 'eliminated' before any cease-fire could come into effect. This document caused something of a stir when it was released, SWAPO naturally claiming that it was a forgery. In view of the earlier murders of such legitimate politicians as Elifas, Kapuuo and Shiyayaga, however, there can be little doubt that it was, indeed, genuine.

The primary purpose of all these 'external' operations has been to pre-empt and disrupt PLAN's incursion efforts before they can lead to increased terrorism inside SWA. In this they have been successful, as illustrated by the steady decline in landmine incidents as PLAN has been forced to move its forward transit camps farther and farther back into Angola. As a result, the insurgents can no longer merely stroll across the border, do their deed and depart; now they face a walk of 100 to 200 kilometers in some cases. This has disrupted PLAN's mine-laying campaign, as a landmine is a heavy and difficult item to carry so far. The attempt to overcome this problem by establishing caches close to the border has been largely countered by thorough reconnaissance and intelligence activity by the security forces. Similarly, most of the recent attempts at major rainy-season offensives have been largely disrupted.

The other major effect of the raids has been to allow the security forces to engage insurgents en bloc. This, in turn has facilitated the use of semi-conventional methods at which the security forces

enjoy a substantial advantage. The result has been heavy casualties among the insurgents, who have seen their overall strength decline from around 12,000 to perhaps 7,000 since the late 1970s despite strenuous recruiting efforts. Finally, specific strikes on command and other headquarters have robbed PLAN of many top-line leaders and staff officers, while the attacks on training camps have removed many trained personnel and instructors from the field.

Despite the undoubted benefit of these operations, there are serious problems involved, which result in reluctance to authorise them. Arguably, the most serious of these lies in the potential for a major clash with FAPLA and Cuban forces, which could escalate the conflict to an entirely new and dangerous level. Another problem is that of minimising civilian casualties. Thus far, this has been addressed by means of pamphlet drops and broadcasts prior to any major raid. With FAPLA tending to take a more active part in support of PLAN, and with PLAN itself fielding more heavy weapons, however, this is not a policy that can be continued indefinitely. In any event, it has the undesirable side-effect of allowing PLAN to decide when and where to accept combat and when to withdraw, losing only easily replaced equipment.

Despite these problems and the inevitable international condemnation, there can be no question of the security forces giving up this option – their most effective and efficient means of combatting the insurgents. Were they to wait for commission of an atrocity before acting, the lives of many civilians would be offered up on the altar of political expediency.

Before discussing operations within northern South-West Africa itself, it is desirable to review the peculiarities of

Owambo, which is the region most affected by the insurgency. Owambo is one of SWA's four northernmost regions, stretching along some 450 km of the Angolan border and about 120 km in depth. Generally sandy and with some areas of very heavy bush, it is astonishingly flat, with virtually no natural feature higher than an average African anthill. Altitude varies from 1090m to 1150m, and the only real gradient is a very gentle 1 in 2500 levelling to 1 in 5000 from north to south.

As one result, what little rain there is – approximately 500mm in a good year – fills up the innumerable long, narrow and shallow depressions-cum-watercourses called *oshanas* or *omurambas*, putting much of the region under water during the rainy season. In central Owambo there is also a large, generally dry delta, which in some years carries water from Angola south towards the Etosha Pan. The flow within the delta or, indeed, in some of the *oshanas*, is naturally very slow. Daytime temperatures are in the low 30s (Celsius) in summer, dropping to the upper 20s in the winter months, when the nights can see temperatures in the low single figures.

Owambo is the home of SWA's largest single population group – 454,000 Owambos out of a total of some 973,000 – of whom some 300,000 live permanently in the area. A similar number of Owambos live in southern Angola, with only a neglected border fence to separate the two groups. Although there are some small towns and villages, most of the Owambos live in small family kraals scattered throughout the region. The economy is based on stock farming and some cropping, with smaller industries and organised handicrafts beginning to take hold. The past few years, in particular, have seen a remarkable degree of business development despite the continuing conflict. Then too, there are several thousand small traders running their 'Cuca shops' – some no more than a pile of goods under a convenient Makalani palm, others with modern buildings and a 7-series BMW or S-class Mercedes parked outside.

There are just over 1000 km of roads in Owambo, of which the 207-km main north-south route is tarred, most of the others being surfaced gravel roads. There is also a confusing network of innumerable local vehicle tracks – some no more than a recent set of tire tracks – made by the locals taking advantage of the flat terrain to cut down on travelling time. Sometimes they overestimate the capabilities of their vehicles, and embarrassed visits to army bases requesting a Buffel to tow someone out of the sand are far from rare.

The remaining infrastructure – still rather limited in view of Owambo's early stage of economic development and the difficulties imposed by terrorism – centres on irrigation and electricity supply. The former comprises a system of water-points, boreholes, dams, canals and

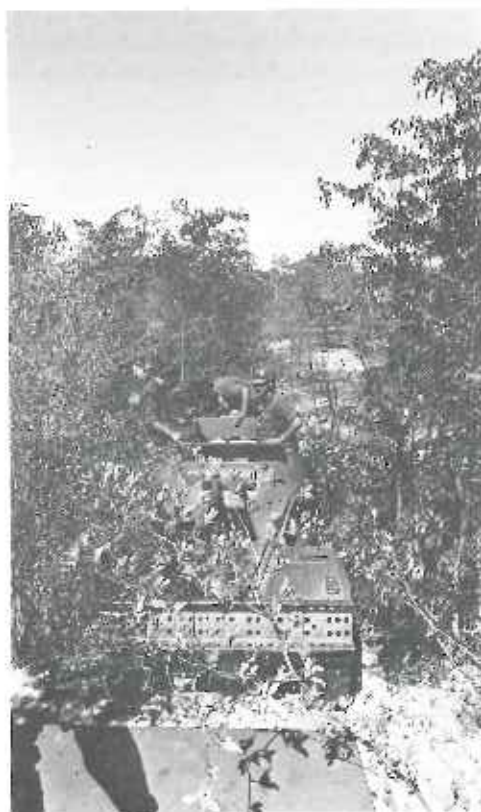


pumping stations which is slowly being expanded. At times it has been a prime target of insurgent activity. The major source of both electricity and water was to have been the giant Ruacana hydro-electric scheme, which was financed by South Africa and Portugal to stimulate development in northern SWA and southern Angola. Unfortunately, this straddles the border and has neither been completed nor taken even partially into service. Ironically, it is SWA that does enjoy some limited benefit from the scheme ever since a civilian helicopter pilot and some friends crossed the border and closed the sluices of one of the minor dams, then threw away the worm gears, thereby preventing them being opened again. Every rainy season now sees some water flow to the turbines.

The Kaokoland, west of Owambo, is a generally dry and harsh region with much rough, hilly country. The small population is concentrated in a few areas, chiefly on or near the Cunene River, and there has been very little economic development thus far. Kavango, east of Owambo, is very similar to Owambo except that it is rather more lush and fertile in the vicinity of the river. Much the same applies to western Caprivi. Eastern Caprivi is also very flat and sandy, but its position in central southern Africa and on the river bank makes it very fertile. It has a healthy agricultural economy, although it does suffer to some degree from isolation from the rest of the territory.

In mid 1984 PLAN fielded some 7000

*Below:* An Eland 60 struggles through dense bush in the Owambo district. The thorns and branches can make such trips very unpleasant.



*Above:* South Africa troops in Chitido after clearing the town of opposition during Operation Klipklop in August 1980.

trained and semi-trained insurgents, of whom an average of 300 would normally be found inside Owambo at any given time. Shortly after the agreement between Angola and South Africa to limit PLAN activity from the former country, as many as 800 additional insurgents were infiltrated into Owambo with instructions that they were to go underground until further notice. Those already in the territory were apparently given similar instructions, as the number of incidents dropped to a new low while PLAN waited to see how it would be affected. One possible indication of how PLAN hopes to overcome this problem surfaced in March 1984, when a group of insurgents entered SWA from Botswana; they had been flown via Lusaka to Francistown and then been driven to the border.

Prior to this new development, the insurgents had habitually moved up to the border in groups of up to 60 and then split into section-sized groups of 5 to 15 on entering Owambo. With increasing security-force activity in cross-border operations since the late 1970s, insurgents have been forced to adopt a semi-covert posture even inside southern Angola, moving in smaller groups and often without the benefit of transit camps near the border. Most recently they have been forced to walk from as far north as Jamba - 300 km inside Angola - and in some areas had to break up into small groups well inside Angola, whereas previously they had been able to motor as far south as Ongiva.

Most of the insurgents have entered Owambo directly since access became available through Angola, but some have sought to outflank the security forces by entering through the Kaokoland. Others have entered the Kaokoland specifically to operate there, and some have attempted to use it as a route to the south.

Attempts to infiltrate Kavango continue but have not been particularly successful except in the western part, where there has been some overlap of operations from Owambo and support is available from insurgents and sympathizers in eastern Owambo.

Within Owambo, the insurgents go about their business as unobtrusively as possible, generally seeking to avoid contact with the security forces. Occasionally, however, a group will bring in mortars, recoilless rifles or even, on very rare occasions, single-tube 122mm rocket launchers, and fire a few rounds at a base, town or protected kraal. Less often, larger groups may form up within Owambo specifically to lay an ambush for a patrol. The only deliberate attacks on any element of the security forces have been those on the protected kraals of some of the headmen, and these have almost invariably been beaten off by the special constables of the guard detail - sometimes with heavy losses to the attacking group.

PLAN's major activity within Owambo is aimed directly at the civilian population, with emphasis on conversion at gunpoint and general intimidation of those not well disposed toward SWAPO - armed propaganda, in the jargon of the professional revolutionary. Many of the groups also rely heavily on what food they can obtain or extort from the kraals in their area. The murder of headmen, shopkeepers, businessmen, officials, politicians and often their families, figures prominently in their activities, as does the occasional random killing designed to keep the populace suitably respectful. Owambos deemed 'puppets' of the 'Boere' are often des-





Above: A member of the SWA Territory Force during refresher training.

patched in particularly gruesome ways, preferably before their families and neighbours. Thus, despite its claims to the contrary, PLAN is still very firmly stuck in the terrorism stage of insurgency and has made no real effort to move beyond it into systematic guerrilla warfare.

Another aspect of PLAN activity is the operation of several very lucrative protection rackets – possibly for the private gain of the groups involved. Finally, recruiting also plays an important part, although this is becoming more difficult as PLAN's military fortunes wane. Where straight recruiting and even the inducement of scholarships fail, abduction is resorted to – sometimes all the children of a given school are marched across the border at gunpoint. Examples of this approach include groups of 119, 200 and 60 abducted in 1978, 1979 and 1980 respectively. Another occasion saw a bus and its passengers highjacked across the border. This kind of activity has decreased in recent years as a result of the cross-border operations and security-force surveillance, which make it difficult to move large groups of unwilling recruits even inside southern Angola.

SWAPO spokesmen, especially the leader Sam Nujoma, naturally deny that their military wing is practising terrorism. Their claim is that they are engaged in guerrilla warfare against the SA forces and that they scrupulously avoid causing civilian casualties. Quite apart from the visible results of the activities outlined above, it is PLAN's love affair with the landmine that ultimately gives the lie to these protestations of innocence.

These sinister surprise packages have become, since 1978, an all-too-familiar feature of road travel in Owambo. Only the

logistic difficulties imposed on PLAN by the cross-border raids have brought some reduction in this particularly brutal application of random terror. One of the worst years was 1980, which saw no fewer than 220 Owambos killed and some 258 injured in mine blasts. The security forces, by contrast, suffer few mine casualties as a result of their liberal equipment with effective mine-resistant vehicles which generally protect their crews from injury and themselves suffer only relatively minor damage. The effect of an anti-tank mine on the average saloon car or light truck is very different and hardly bears description. Even less does the nature of the injuries suffered by their passengers, who are often unidentifiable. It is sometimes difficult to establish how many people were in a vehicle simply because there are not enough identifiable parts left among the debris.

PLAN's affair with the landmine should not come as a surprise to anyone even peripherally familiar with the theory of insurgency. Despite its voluble protestations to the contrary, PLAN does not seem to feel that it has sufficient popular support even in Owambo to move out of the terrorism stage. The landmine fits into this admirably; it is the ideal weapon of random terror. Rendering the normal use of Owambo's dirt roads an extremely hazardous undertaking, the landmine serves both to spread fear and uncertainty among the population and to undermine confidence in the authorities' ability to offer meaningful protection. Additionally, it hinders economic development that might have gone some way toward negating SWAPO propaganda.

Another advantage of the landmine from PLAN's viewpoint is that it achieves all this without the necessity of any contact with the security forces. For this and other reasons, it has also proven a popular assassination tool – a landmine laid in the driveway or under the wheel of a parked car leaves very little room for doubt or counteraction. At least one member of the Owambo Government – Thomas Shikongo – was killed in this way, together with his daughter and some friends. A similar attempt on the life of another Owambo minister – Tara Imbili – was frustrated when the laying team blew themselves up upon being startled by an accidental discharge caused by one of the minister's guards loading his pistol while on his way to commune with nature.

While most of the mines are laid on the many gravel roads – and on their verges, to catch those who think they are clever – there have been many attempts to lay under the tar of the main north-south road. Expedients have included tunnelling under the road from the verge and also heating a 200-litre drum and using it to lift out a section of the surface. None, however, has proved immune to detection by the motorcycle sweep teams which go

over the road every morning. Anti-personnel mines are sometimes laid with anti-vehicle mines in an effort to hamper clearing work. They are also similarly employed in conjunction with sabotage efforts and have been laid in the path of pursuing security forces elements to delay them.

The insurgents' equipment comprises the usual mix of Eastern Bloc small arms, with the AK-47 family and the RPG-7 both particularly well represented. The average group carries an RPG-7 with several reloads, a light machine gun and AK-47 rifles. The SKS carbine has also been used, primarily for its ability to fire rifle grenades. Some Western and older weapons are also encountered from time to time. Both 60- and 82mm mortars have been used, as have some light recoilless rifles and single-tube 122mm rocket launchers. Most recently, some insurgent groups have also taken to carrying SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles. Another recent development is the appearance of Dragunov sniping rifles in some groups.

Webbing and other equipment is kept to a minimum, both to keep down weight and because many groups carry civilian clothes and often wear them for concealment, some routinely changing into civilian clothes on or just prior to crossing the border. Some of the insurgents go so far as to wear several layers of clothing to ensure a quick change capability. Radio equipment is available but not often carried by the smaller groups. Rations are generally in tinned form and are often largely drawn from relief supplies shipped to so-called 'Namibian refugees' in Angola. Most medical stores are from similar sources. Most insurgents also carry money to enable them to supplement their rations with purchases from local shops rather than seizures. Even so, extortion of food and other items is rife, as is looting.

Over most of Owambo the terrain tends to favour the insurgents, the flatness granting them almost unbelievable mobility on foot. This is enhanced by the poor visibility caused by the combination of flat ground and often heavy bush. Finally, in the rainy season, the profuse surface water and frequent rainfall renders tracking extremely difficult. Insurgents have occasionally used bicycles and light trucks 'borrowed' from the local population or provided by supporters. Much of the heavy equipment and most of the mines are moved to preselected caches by porter groups so as to free highly trained specialists for their real tasks and reduce their exposure to the security forces.

When contact with security forces results despite the insurgents' best efforts at concealment and anti-tracking, they generally choose to 'bombshell' – breaking contact and scattering to rendezvous later at a pre-arranged location. Always





Above: Sweep team preparing their equipment prior to work on the Oshivelo-Oshakati road.

very careful about leaving any trail, they become even more so when pursued, employing all of the anti-tracking measures and even changing clothes and shoes more or less on the run. Abrupt changes of direction also feature in their repertoire as, occasionally, does circling back on their own spoor in an effort to ambush their pursuers. A large group may feel sufficiently confident to take on its pursuers in an ambush, usually selecting the L-ambush pattern for this purpose. Here, too, the norm is to decamp if the first burst of fire does not weaken or demoralise pursuers. Overall, the insurgents are simply not well enough trained to take on the security forces in combat, even on relatively favourable terms.

Security-force missions are aligned with modern counterinsurgency doctrine, diverging only insofar as demanded by situational peculiarities. Thus Owambo's flatness, for example, renders many such 'standard' measures as random and mechanised ambushes, observation posts and listening posts of very limited value. The large amount of surface water complicates matters during the rainy season by making the insurgents independent of normal water sources and frustrating tracking efforts. The heavy bush cover, in turn, further restricts the utility of ambushes and also ensures that many contacts are at very close range.

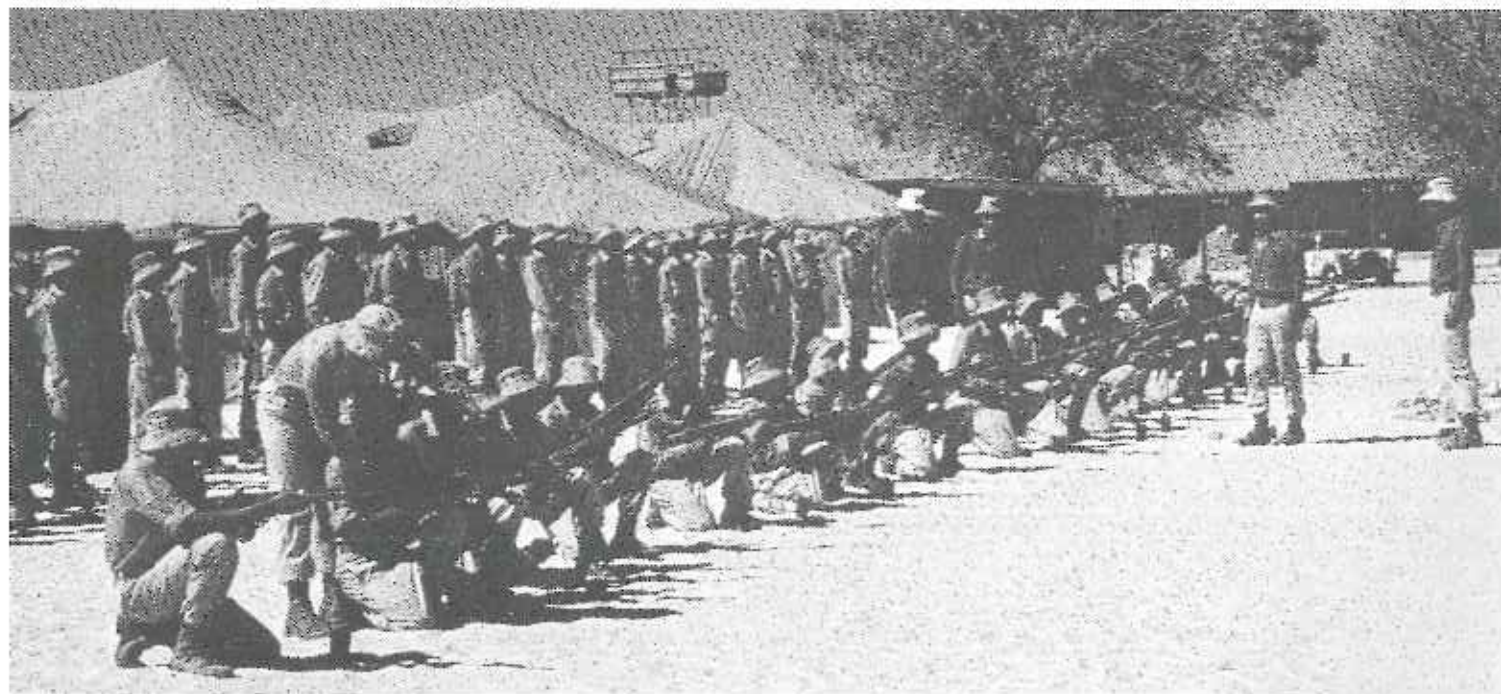
The 'protected village' or 'strategic hamlet' approach is impossible to apply among Owambo's population, scattered as it is through agricultural necessity. The sheer logistic difficulties of seeking to

apply such a system can be appreciated only when the situation has been seen on the ground. The alienation that would result can be readily imagined – as it is, the security forces do not seriously attempt to interdict the routine cross-border visiting that goes on, let alone restrict movement within Owambo. The insurgents' access to most of Owambo's population thus remains to a considerable degree unhindered.

The security-force organisational base is the 'skeleton battalion', of which four are deployed in Sector 10, which has responsibility for Owambo and the adjacent Kaokoland. The 'skeleton' of headquarters and administrative staff is made up of PF personnel on tours of two to three years and some NSM posted to the operational area for the bulk of their national service. Combat elements of the battalions vary in strength and composition according to the situation, with the rainy season, for instance, bringing considerable reinforcement. The battalion areas are broken up into company areas covered by operations from permanent company bases. On occasion, companies will not move into a permanent base, but will remain mobile throughout their tour.

The necessary infantry companies, armoured car squadrons, engineers and other elements are drawn from the training units in SA and from the CF and Commandos. The NSM from the training units usually serve several four-month tours during their national service. CF and Commando personnel can be called up for three-month tours every second year. They usually undergo refresher training in southern Owambo before assignment to a

Below: Special Constables receive initial small arms training. They are mostly employed protecting government installations or people believed to be under threat.







Above: Among the posters in this SWAPO lecture room are portraits of Fidel Castro and of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.

battalion. Companies are also drawn from the standing battalions and the CF units of the SWATF; these make up an increasing proportion of the total force. Individual officers and NCOs from the CF and Commandos are also called up to fill staff and specialist posts from time to time.

The police, who initially bore the brunt of the insurgency, are still active in the counterinsurgency role, along with normal police tasks in the operational area. They have three different elements involved in the fighting: the normal police COIN units, a guard force and the special unit known as Ops K or Koevoet. COIN units operate much like army rifle companies and platoons, with responsibility

for a specific sector, and are made up of both SWA and SA police – regulars and reservists – serving short tours of duty in the operational area.

A fourth element is involved in counterinsurgency operations against any insurgents who succeed in penetrating through the Operational Area. This is the SWA Police Task Force, headquartered in Windhoek, which has several groups deployed to different parts of northern SWA below the Red Line. It is also responsible for meeting any insurgents who might come through Botswana and for reacting to incidents of urban terrorism. Its groups operate according to much the same tactical principles as those of Ops K. Like the Ops K groups, they are comprised of a mix of regular police and special constable volunteers.

Guard-force personnel are recruited

locally – also in the Kaokoland, Kavango and Caprivi – and employed specifically for VIP and key-point protection. All volunteers, the special constables receive a basic eight weeks' training at the school near Ondangwa before being posted out to guard detachments. Training opens with parade ground work to build co-ordination and *esprit* and moves on via basic weapons instruction to rural counterinsurgency operations with emphasis on security tasks. Promotion within the force is purely on demonstrated merit: there are no promotion courses as such. Members wishing to join the police force proper can do so, but must first complete the normal police college training.

The guard detachments vary in size from a few men to a reinforced platoon, depending on the level of the perceived threat and the nature of the target. Similarly, the precautions taken at the various protected kraals and installations will vary from a simple fence to an earth wall with proper bunkers and emplaced machine guns. Equipment consists essentially of light infantry weapons up to the light machine gun and the 60mm mortar. Some mine-resistant vehicles are also issued as needed. Despite their relatively short training, the special constables have generally acquitted themselves well in action, and no detachment has ever been overrun or forced to vacate its position.

Ops K is a mobile counterinsurgency unit made up of locally recruited special constables and NCOs and led by regular police officers and NCOs of the SAP or SWAPOL. It originated in the need to provide a speedy reaction to intelligence gained by the security branch. Controlled from Oshakati, it has elements stationed in the Kaokoland and Kavango under local HQs but is, in fact, entirely mobile in its





operations, going where intelligence leads it. The local knowledge of the special constables is backed up by the presence of several former PLAN members serving with the unit. Operations are conducted almost exclusively on the basis of incoming intelligence, and combat is carried out when possible mounted in Casspir APCs. This combination has proved resoundingly successful, and Koevoet is without doubt the premier unit available to the security forces for their internal operations.

The security forces' actual operations, highly interactive by nature, can still be broken down into categories for the purpose of discussion. A broad outline of the typical operations follows.

**Border Control:** While border closure is impracticable, as discussed above, the border is regularly patrolled, both on foot and by vehicle. The intensity of this patrol activity varies from section to section, depending upon the terrain, the local population density, the proximity of likely targets and the degree of PLAN activity in the area. Popular crossing areas are additionally covered by ambushes and observation posts. The actual border is marked by a rather dilapidated fence and a 'cut line' bulldozed out of the bush. A one-kilometer-deep strip immediately south of the border has been evacuated and is officially a 'no go' zone, although this is not taken too seriously by either the local population or the security forces. Any

tracks found in the cut line are followed up immediately and cutting-off or ambush measures are initiated. Several comparable cut lines have been established inside Owambo and are similarly handled.

**Patrolling:** As is the case in most counterinsurgency campaigns, patrols of all kinds form the backbone of security-force operations. Apart from those with specific tasks – such as border and road patrols – intensive random patrols are also conducted. These serve both to keep the security forces visible and to heighten the

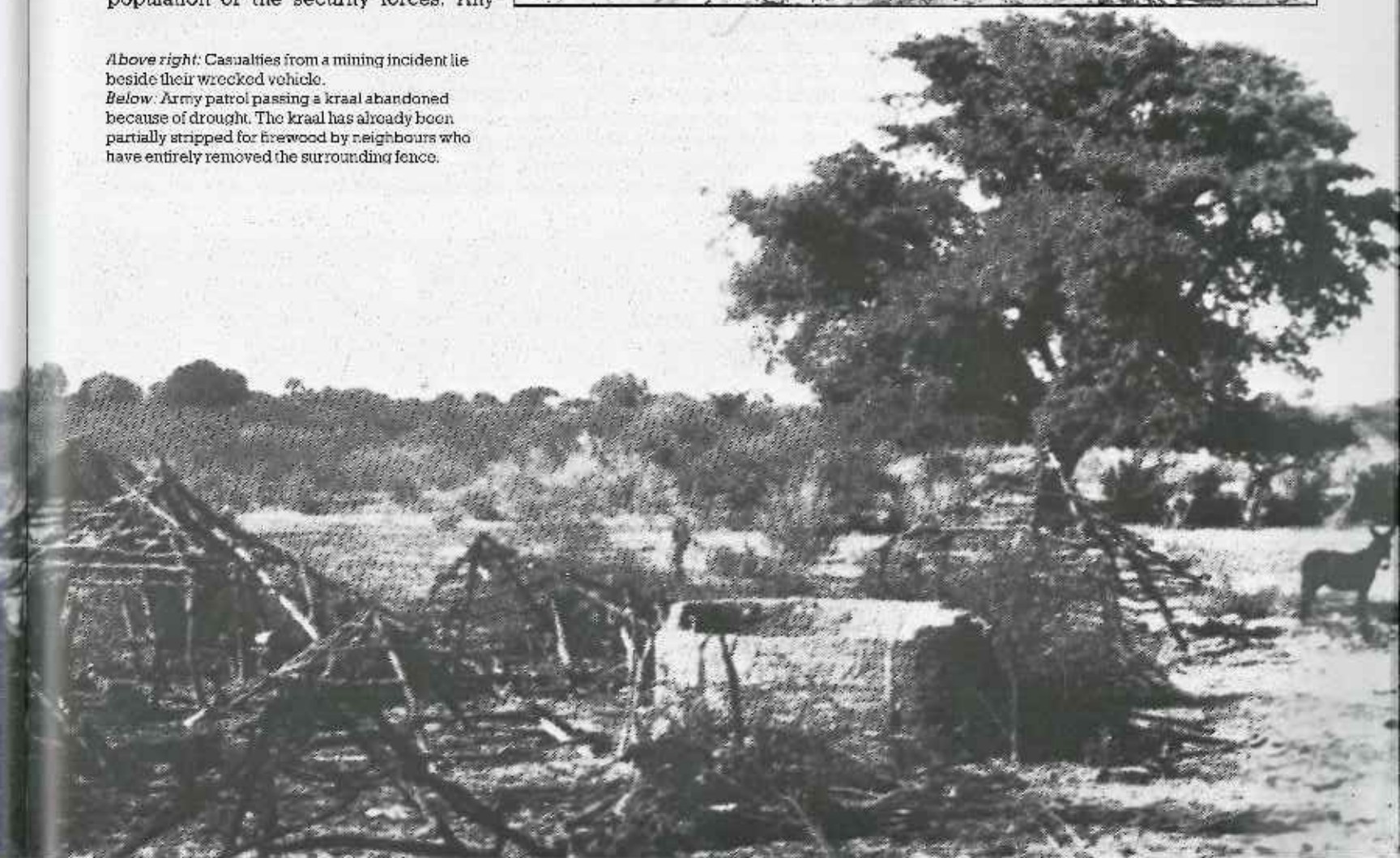
unease of any insurgents in the area, who cannot effectively predict when or where they might encounter a patrol. Patrols are carried out on foot, on horseback or by vehicle as dictated by the mission and the terrain. Most are carried out in platoon or half-platoon strength, the armoured cars almost invariably operating only by troops.

**Search and Destroy:** Cordon-and-search, sweep, and search-and-destroy missions are generally carried out in response to intelligence, but may also be



*Above right:* Casualties from a mining incident lie beside their wrecked vehicle.

*Below:* Army patrol passing a kraal abandoned because of drought. The kraal has already been partially stripped for firewood by neighbours who have entirely removed the surrounding fence.







Above: A Special Constable guards Herero leader Kauima Ruruako at the 1980 Herero Day festivities at Okahandja in 1980.

conducted on suspicion or at random in an effort to stir any insurgents who may be present into movement which will reveal them to the security forces. One variation on this theme are the 'Hawk Ops', which are essentially high-speed cordon-and-search operations with helicopters used to insert the troops and support provided by spotter aircraft or light helicopters.

**Ambushes, Observation and Listening Posts:** Limited in their effectiveness by the flat and bushy terrain which does almost nothing to channel the insurgents' movements, these are generally employed only in response to specific information or intelligence, although some are placed more or less at random.

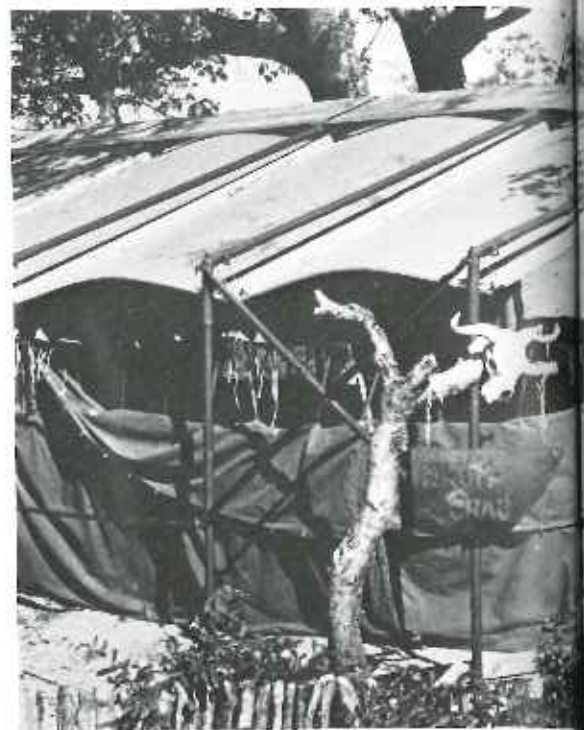
**Roadblocks:** These, again, are employed both at random and in response to information and intelligence; they are also used as a means of gathering information and to restrict PLAN's use of vehicles.

**Protection Operations:** Largely within the ambit of the police guard unit, these encompass the protection of key installations and individuals: those who have been threatened, whose names have been found on captured 'hit lists', or who seem likely targets for abduction or assassination. Various members of the Owambo Government and many of the headmen fall into these categories. Some installations are protected by Army elements.

**Operations in Aid of the Civil Power:** Designed to keep the government functioning in the face of sabotage and terrorism, these, too, are chiefly protective operations. Typical examples would include the protection of roadworks teams, cattle inoculation parties and school inspectors. A similar operation is that of

the pension convoys that do the rounds of pensioners under army escort to pay out pensions and allowances. Railways' police with Buffels seconded from the Army provide an escort to the more important groups of railways and private trucks moving goods up to Owambo from the Tsumeb railhead. Another aspect, which falls entirely to the army, lies in the sweeping of roads for mines. The main tarred road is swept every morning by engineers on motorcycles, backed up by a lifting party and an escort in a Buffel. The more important gravel roads are also swept on a daily basis, although this is a rather lengthier process, as a visual check does not suffice. Smaller roads are swept less frequently, some only when major movement is intended or when information is received indicating that mines may have been laid. Unfortunate though this is for the civilian motorist, there are simply too many roads and tracks for all to be cleared constantly.

**Civic Action:** Less visible in Owambo, where emphasis necessarily remains on directly military tasks, civic-action programmes form an important part of security-forces activity in the operational area. While there are some major projects, the preference is toward providing the necessary specialist expertise, heavy equipment and some of the materials to enable self-help projects to get off the ground. Schoolteachers, agricultural advisors and medical personnel are also provided where necessary. Civilian specialists such as ophthalmologists are brought to the area by the SADF at intervals to provide treatment not otherwise available locally. Other activities include youth camps and an ecology awareness programme, which it is hoped was begun early enough to save the region some of

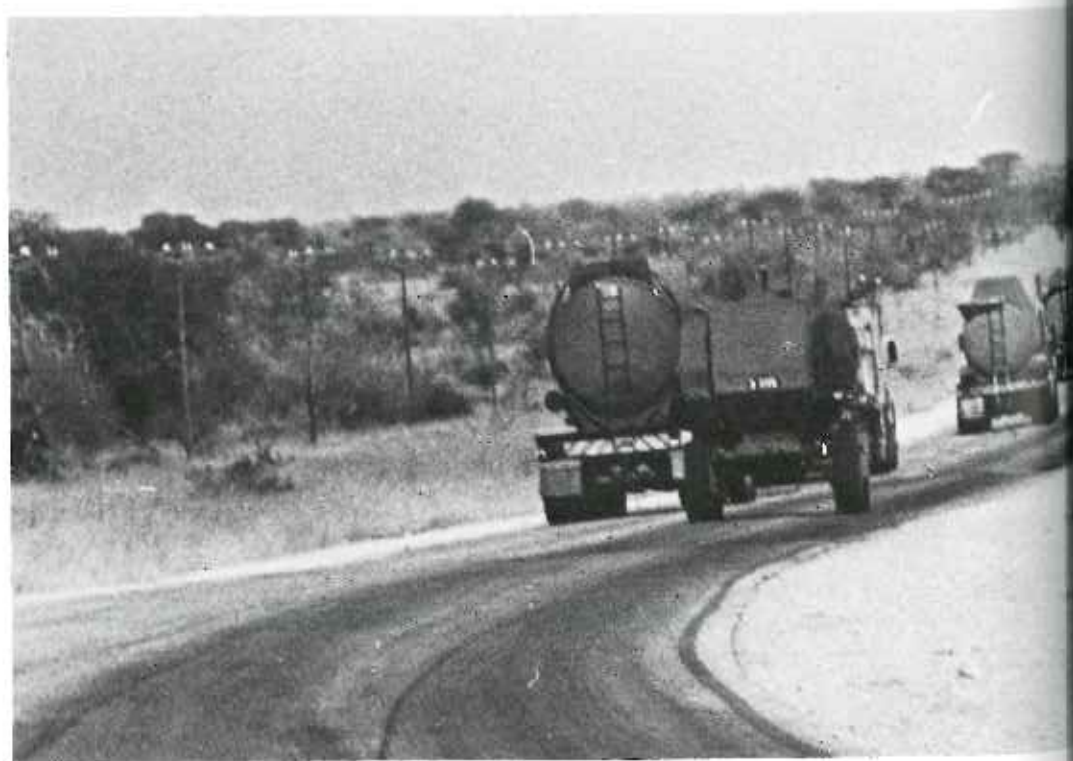


Above: The sickbay at the main 203 Bn base at Tsumkwe. 203 Bn is mostly engaged in civic action work but also provides local security in the area.

the damage that has occurred elsewhere in the name of progress.

One surprising aspect of counterinsurgency operations in Owambo has been the success enjoyed by armour and the other mobile elements of the security forces in what is generally regarded as an infantryman's type of war. This may be due in large part to Owambo's flatness and generally fair going, which grant military

Below: A Convoy of Railways Road Transport Service tankers being escorted by Buffels on the main Oshana-Ondangwa road.







vehicles remarkable area-covering ability. This has allowed much of the coverage to be allocated to armoured car squadrons, thereby making it possible to concentrate the infantry effort more effectively. Where such normal vehicles as armoured cars and APCs are not suitable, motorcycles and horse-mounted infantry have proven quite successful.

Perhaps the most astonishing aspect is that parties of insurgents have not infrequently been surprised by armoured cars or APCs in the bush. In one case, a patrol of Elands and Buffels – admittedly coming from downwind – got to within 100 meters of a group of 22 insurgents before being noticed. Once in contact, the armoured vehicles naturally enjoy the advantages of

massive firepower, protection and mobility by comparison with their opponents. Keeping on the move throughout a contact, they are also very difficult targets in the bush for the RPG-7 gunners who may be among the insurgents.

Apart from area patrols, armoured cars are also employed on sweeps, as convoy escorts and in support of cordon-and-search operations. The three main types of mine-resistant APC – Buffel, Hippo and Casspir – are similarly employed in addition to their transport role. A number of Ratel ICVs have also been employed in Owambo and in operations against insurgents who had penetrated into the Tsumeb area. While they proved popular for their weight and power, which allowed them to

plow through bush with little difficulty, their fully enclosed troop compartment has not been well received.

Other mobile forces include motorcycle elements and mounted infantry. The former are chiefly employed on road sweeps and as a reaction force and enjoy considerable mobility in bush that would seriously hamper other vehicles. Interestingly, they have also found that the sound of their motorcycles is not a major problem, as it is apparently muffled and distorted by the bush. The mounted infantry are more often employed on long patrols, or patrols far from the nearest base in areas where vehicle or helicopter insertion is felt to be too noisy. Also, they are even more mobile in dense bush than the motorcycles.

The various mine-resistant vehicles themselves are an interesting outcome of operations in northern SWA. The chief ones presently in use are the Buffel, Casspir and Hippo APCs and the 10-tonne Kwévoel truck. All have proved themselves thoroughly. Properly strapped into one of these vehicles, the chances of surviving even a multiple mine detonation without serious injury are more than excellent. There is also a profusion of other, lighter vehicles and a number of more or less 'one-off' types. Among these are the logistic variants of the Buffel and Hippo (Zebra), post office trucks with mine-resistant cabs, mine-resistant buses and road graders and others. Many of these vehicles are also used by various government departments and by major contractors working in the operational area. Some of the lighter ones, such as the Ribbok, Rheebock and Rooikat, are also available to individuals.

The SAAF operates in support of both internal and external operations, as well as in the logistics role. Arguably, the most important aircraft are the helicopters, which are very much maids of all work. Pumas are the chief trooping and casevac aircraft and are also used for resupply missions to patrols. The lighter Alouette IIIs are used chiefly for the spotting, command-and-control and liaison functions. Proper gunships are not available, a lack that hampers operations to some degree, as does the small number of all helicopter types. While small arms and light anti-aircraft guns do present a threat, the biggest problem for the helicopters is that of the ever-present dust, which has always presented a major maintenance headache.

Light strike missions and much of the close air support work during external operations are generally flown by the Impala Mk IIs stationed at the main airbases in the operational area. Their pilots are also justly proud of their performance in the night strike and CAS roles, both of which demand extraordinary skill in an aircraft as basic and devoid of modern electronics as the Impala. Many of the





reconnaissance flights used to keep tabs on PLAN activity in southern Angola have also been flown by the Impalas. Even more so than the helicopters, the Impalas have to operate in the face of intense air-defence activity that has included weapons as sophisticated as the SA-9 and SA-8. They are especially wary of the same light anti-aircraft guns – chiefly the 23mm ZU-23-2 – that have also caused problems in the ground role.

Major external operations enjoy additional support in the form of Mirages, Buccaneers and Canberras. The Mirages and, to a lesser extent, the Buccaneers, fly in both the CAS and strike roles while the Canberras operate as medium-level bombers. Weapons used include anti-personnel and 450kg high-explosive bombs and rockets. One Buccaneer was instrumental in holding up advancing enemy armour during the extraction phase of the raid on the 'Moscow' camp in 1978, when it flew a series of dummy runs after having expended first its anti-tank and then its anti-personnel rockets in various attacks. Some Mirages have also been stationed periodically at Ondangwa in the air-defence role, when there has been reason to expect possible FAPLA air activity. The Canberras are also flown on long-range reconnaissance missions, usually with an escort of Mirages.

The Bosbok is often employed on a variety of missions including normal army co-operation, road and power-line patrol, scout and spotter. It operates routinely along cut lines, in conjunction with patrols, cordon-and-search, and sweep operations; and in reaction to incidents; also as artillery spotter and forward air control, the latter two roles chiefly during major external operations. Other Bosbok mis-

sions include night spotting; watching for possible mining activity or vehicle movement on the main road; and in night airfield security using flares and Telstar or communications relay. The latter operations are flown both for the SAAF during strike missions and the Army. They are the least popular missions, as they can last up to six to seven hours with little to keep the pilot's interest. Another type of mission resulting from the flat terrain is that of controlling the movement of ground forces in contact and providing navigation assistance during the longer moves.

The external operations have provided their fair share of excitement for the Bosbok crews, chiefly in the form of intense anti-aircraft fire from various guns and with SA-7s. Generally, however, the Bosbok's agility has kept it out of harm's way despite its intensive employment. The Kudu is used chiefly in light-transport and liaison roles, but also sees occasional action in some of the Bosbok roles. Just how intensive this can be was demonstrated during Operation Protea, when up to five Bosbok were in the air simultaneously from first to last light. None was hit by the air defences. One neutralised a 23mm gun that had been holding up the ground forces by placing its smoke-marker rockets in the gun pit while marking the target for strike aircraft.

The Kudu is heavily used for a wide variety of light transport, liaison and casevac/medevac roles within the operational area. On occasion, Kudu are also used in some of the Bosbok roles if they are the most readily available aircraft. Pamphlet drops also figure in their repertoire, as do 'skyshout' missions flown with powerful public address systems. The latter have been brought to a fine art in

co-operation with Intelligence: it is not uncommon for a group of insurgents to find some members being addressed by name in the course of a skyshout mission.

C-130s and C-160s operate regular transport flights from the Republic to the major transit base at Grootfontein and to such major operational-area bases as Ondangwa, Ruacana, Rundu and Mpacha. C-160s and Dakotas are also used on regular transport services within the operational area and between it and Grootfontein. The DC-4s are generally seen only with visiting VIPs or visitor groups. Apart from logistic support missions, the C-130s are also used to move most of the troops to and from the operational area or Grootfontein in the course of their rotation.

Late 1983 saw a significant development in the then 17-year-old war when South Africa offered to suspend operations into southern Angola if the Angolan Government would undertake to prevent further infiltration from there. This offer met with considerable suspicion, and its credibility was not enhanced by a major raid – Operation Askari – that followed soon after. But it finally bore fruit on 16 February 1984 in Lusaka, when South Africa and Angola reached an agreement based on the original offer. In terms of this agreement, those elements of the security forces then dominating much of southern Angola would be withdrawn as FAPLA forces re-established their control over the region. PLAN elements would be required to withdraw northward and cease operations from southern Angola into SWA. FAPLA would prevent their return to the border region or passage of forces through it en route to SWA.

Control over this disengagement pro-





cess was delegated to a Joint Monitoring Commission that included both SADF and FAPLA officers with several companies of troops – the SADF drawing its contingent from 32 Bn. Its first headquarters was established at Cuvelai – some 250km north of the Angola/SWA border – and the JMC began clearing PLAN elements from the northernmost section of the region after the first official meeting (March 1984). As these operations progressed, the JMC HQ was moved southward, first to Mupa in late March, then to Evale in mid-April and to Ongiva in the first week of May. The final phase will see JMC headquarters at the border post at Oshikango while the remaining strip along the border is secured. Throughout the operation PLAN made attempts to evade JMC patrols and retain some presence in the area and movement through it into SWA. Several of these incidents led to exchanges of fire between the PLAN elements and the joint FAPLA/32 Bn JMC patrols.

While it has started off well and weathered several delays and differences of opinion, the success of this diplomatic venture will depend in the long run entirely on whether FAPLA can keep PLAN elements out of the border regions. Should it fail, and infiltration on any scale recur, the security forces will inevitably resume their patrolling of and raids into the area. Success would mean that Angola could begin to restore the economy of one of its richest regions, which has been shattered by the almost continuous operations against PLAN elements since 1978. For SWA, it would bring the prospect of truly 'free and fair' elections that much closer, as SWAPO would be largely robbed of the advantages its terrorism has brought it. The mere fact of Angola having – despite

the Soviet influence – demonstrably turned its back on SWAPO's campaign of terrorism will also hearten peaceful politicians and gravely damage SWAPO's standing in the eyes of its supporters.

It is clear that SWAPO has recognised this danger: early in the proceedings it began a major effort to infiltrate some 800 insurgents into Owambo with orders to 'go underground' until activated. Underlying this operation is the concept that these personnel can be reactivated gradually over a long period of time, thereby maintaining a PLAN presence while SWAPO leaders seek a way around the Angola problem. In an early attempt to deal with it, a small group of insurgents entered SWA through Botswana. However, they were promptly repulsed and the Botswana authorities have shown themselves anything but keen to have such an effort repeated.

With no major infiltration route readily available, PLAN will face severe difficulties in maintaining even its recent level of operations. Its remaining hope will then lie in either Zambia or Zimbabwe allowing

operations from their territory into the eastern Caprivi – full circle to the early and ineffectual days prior to the Portuguese collapse. Neither of those countries, however, is likely to welcome this prospect. PLAN may thus find itself restricted to limited internal operations supported as best possible by evading the security forces of various neighbouring countries.

Under these circumstances, SWAPO's best option would be to enter the election process as quickly as possible to capitalise on the lingering effects of its terrorism. Once the present atmosphere of fear has left the northern regions of SWA – and particularly Owambo – and normal government services have again become practical, its influence can only begin to wane. By the same token it will be very much in the interests of the peaceful political parties to seek to delay elections for at least 12 to 18 months, while these developments take effect. An election held after such a cooling-off period would allow the parties to contest purely on the basis of their political platforms.



Above: Intelligence personnel searching the bodies of insurgents killed in a contact with an armoured car patrol.

Below: The patrol waiting for the arrival of the intelligence group.

