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"Heading for the Gun": Skills and Sophistication in an African Guerrilla War

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For much of the last seventy-five years African combatants, especially in wars of their own making, have not been seen as masters of the guns they shoot. In Kenya in the 1950s, for example, captured Mau Mau were humiliated: they were taken to shooting ranges where they failed to hit a target with their guns.[1] More recently, rebels in southern Sudan considered guns poor, if effective substitutes for more embodied weapons like spears, while young men in Sierra Leone fought with the weapons at hand such as knives or machetes, because they were too poor to obtain guns.[2] When the armies of Ethiopia and Eritrea fought well and hard with sophisticated weapons, it was said to be the result of Cold War rivalries or national agendas gone berserk.[3] Rhodesia's bush war, Zimbabweans' liberation struggle, suggests something else, a space shaped by technology and clientelism in which guns, most especially guns in guerrilla hands, exemplify very specific European ideas about Africans, that they are skilled and sophisticated.

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[1] Ian Henderson, with Philip Goodheart, *Manhunt in Kenya* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958), 70–71.

[2] Sharon Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas: Coping with Money, War, and the State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 103; Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, and Resources in Sierra Leone* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996), xx.

[3] Michela Wrong, *I Didn't Do It for You: How the World Betrayed a Small African Nation* (New York: Harper, 2005), 345–47; but see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261–72; and Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 17–19, 84–91.

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Rhodesia's white minority made a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) in 1965, to preserve "justice, civilization, and Christianity" and to defend itself against "the communists in the Afro-Arab bloc."[4] The country became Zimbabwe in 1980 after almost fourteen years of a bloody and brutal war fought against two African guerrilla armies, which fought each other as well as Rhodesians. By 1966 there were a few guerrilla incursions into the country. Almost at once Rhodesians began to praise the soldiering skills and sophistication of their enemies. In a variety of domains, they wrote about how well guerrillas had been trained in Moscow or China, and what accurate shots they were. At the same time, Africans who fought for Rhodesia, especially the all-volunteer, white-commanded Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR), were often said to be bad shots, although by every statistical measure they were the most effective unit Rhodesians had.

The idea that the African enemy is well armed and skilled in the use of those weapons, while the African ally is well trained but a bad shot, echoes ideas about Africans and guns in nineteenth-century South Africa. There, African enemies were said to be good shots, and African allies terrible ones, in large part because such representations fueled demands that Africans be disarmed and controlled.[5] But for Rhodesia, and then for Zimbabwe, the standard settler narrative fit neither weapons nor politics. For one thing, it is impossible to have a concept of accurate fire with automatic weapons. For another, by the last years of Rhodesia's bush war Rhodesians could only imagine a negotiated settlement under majority rule; they knew they would never be in a position to determine Africans' access to arms. As the war escalated in the mid-1970s, Rhodesian ideas about the power and precision of guerrilla fire became widespread. In 1973 a white farmer told a reporter for London's *Daily Telegraph*, "We know these chaps are using highly sophisticated modern weapons. I would call it Mao Mao rather than Mau Mau." In a 1976 novel a Rhodesian officer lectures a group of aging mercenaries that the guerrillas they face are "a hell of a lot better than anything you've run on before."[6] In 1977 Special Branch lectured national servicemen that guerrillas were not "invincible or invisible," nor were they "as well trained and well equipped as you are, as intelligent as you are."[7] In contrast, novels and memoirs by and about guerrillas report frustrated men putting their weapons on automatic and "firing

[4] Ian Smith, *The Great Betrayal: The Memoirs of Ian Douglas Smith* (London: Blake, 1997), 106, quoting from his radio address announcing UDI to the nation.

[5] William K. Storey, "Guns, Race, and Skill in Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa," *Technology and Culture* 45 (2004): 687–711.

[6] Giles Tippette, *The Mercenaries* (New York: Dell, 1976), 225.

[7] Quoted in Anthony R. Wilkinson, *Insurgency in Rhodesia, 1957–1973* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1973), 16; Supt. Isemonger, BSAP HQ, Salisbury, Terrorist Tactics, 28 June 1977, Rhodesian Army Association, British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, Bristol. RAA/2001/086/010/869.

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blindly," or of losing familiarity with weapons in the inactive years of 1976–1977. No guerrillas said they could not handle guns, but neither did they boast of accurate fire or extraordinary skills.

GUERRILLA WAR AND GUERRILLA GUNS

Despite occasional claims to the contrary, this war was not so much a shooting war as it was a war of attrition, in which guerrilla armies sought to mobilize the countryside and drive whites either from the country or to the negotiating table. Patrols of Rhodesian security forces tried to find and kill or capture patrols of guerrillas, who were trying not to engage security forces at all. After 1974, when a guerrilla patrol stood and fought, security forces assumed the patrol thought they were fighting a patrol of the other guerrilla army—hence the need for so many counter-gangs comprised of Africans or well-blacked-up whites. Even so, few in the security forces seemed to be trying to shoot, either. In memoir and fiction many white Rhodesian soldiers boasted of their training (they had to be able to disassemble and assemble a gun blindfolded, one claimed) and of the marksmanship their fathers had taught them, but in just as many novels and memoirs, and most especially in official reports, white soldiers shot badly.[8] By 1977, when the Rhodesian government began to talk of eventual majority rule, many white soldiers complained bitterly that they did not know what they were fighting for, and simply did not fire their weapons.[9]

Nevertheless, this was a war in which guns occupied a powerful and iconic place. Rhodesian security forces used the Belgian-made FN, while the AK-47 was quite literally the sign of both guerrilla armies—the Zimbabwe Peoples' Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA, the name given the army of the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union, or ZAPU, after 1971) and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA, the army of the Zimbabwe African National Union, or ZANU). ZANU had split from ZAPU in 1963, and

[8] For example, see Basil O'Connell-Jones, *Amazing Grace* (Kirksville, Mo.: Scribbles and Scribes Inc., 2001), 68; and Graham Doke, *First Born* (Cape Town: Book, 2000), 15, 34–35. Military historians may be more comfortable with my use of novels and memoirs than African historians are. But military historians have long argued, after Lord Wellington, that the experience of war is too fragmented and too constricted (it was like a ball, he wrote) for anyone, general or private, to know what was going on in all of it; different accounts from different vantage points helped reconstruct battles and patrols. See John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 117. More important, perhaps, is that these fragmentary accounts make up for some of the problems with an undifferentiated notion of experience, in which what is seen is depicted exclusively in contemporary language. Novels and memoirs are not eyewitness accounts in any classic sense, but taken together they allow me to see broader patterns in wartime actions and ideas that I otherwise might. See Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

[9] Consolidated Report from Main Joint Operating Commands, "State of Morale in the Territorial Army," 5 May 1977, RAA 2001/086/263/997.

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between 1969 and 1971 almost one-third of ZAPU's army defected to ZANLA, including many who had been trained in Russia.[10] The FN and the AK-47 were the accepted shorthands for political loyalties. Thus the blurb for a novel about a Colored Rhodesian soldier captured and turned by ZIPRA: "His FN is replaced with an AK-47."[11] Robin Moore, amanuensis of the Green Berets and self-appointed American ambassador to wartime Rhodesia, wrote a novel in which an American nun cares for a wounded guerrilla. She asks him if he needs anything. "Just my AK-47 so I can go out and kill white men," he replies.[12]

The best description of both weapons comes from the writings of two soldiers with the all-white Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI), one a reluctant national serviceman, the other so flattered by the attention of regulars that he enlisted as a commando after his national service. The FN was the weapon of the Rhodesian infantry. (Reservists in the Rhodesia Regiments got them when they were available, but were more often issued whatever was at hand, however old). The FN had two rates of fire: it could be shot as either a repeating rifle or a fully automatic weapon. The Rhodesian Army frowned on automatic fire, since it wasted too much ammunition and when on automatic the gun tended to pull upward and was difficult to control. Besides, when FNs were in constant use, as they were in Rhodesia after 1977, they tended to jam when fired on automatic. The FN was a sophisticated, "temperamental" weapon, in need of regular care and cleaning. Better marksmen in the RLI fitted their FNs with telescopic sights or a device that hid the gun's flash, and added weight to the muzzle to keep it low, but they still used their weapons as single-shot rifles.[13] As a rule, the heavier the gun the easier it is to keep low when firing. The FN weighed almost ten pounds loaded—about the same as the AK-47—but the FN's twenty-round magazines weighed about the same as the AK's thirty-round magazines (just over one pound), and so for every fifteen pounds a Rhodesian soldier carried a guerrilla carried just ten. Guerrillas carried as many magazines as were available rather than a set number; Rhodesian soldiers were frequently unwilling to carry as many magazines as

[10] David Martin and Phyllis Johnson, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981), 88–90; ZAPU's army became ZIPRA in 1970, but almost everyone uses the term ZIPRA to describe those ZAPU fighting in the 1960s. There were two other African nationalist parties: the African National Council (ANC), which was the umbrella organization for ZAPU in the mid-1970s, and the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI), founded in 1971. FROLIZI had a very small army of ZANLA deserters, while the ANC briefly recruited soldiers under its own name.

[11] Paul Hotz, *Muzukuru, A Guerilla's Story* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1990).

[12] Robin Moore, *The White Tribe* (Encampment, Wyo.: Affiliated Publishers of America, 1991), 165.

[13] Chris Cocks, *Fireforce: One Man's War in the Rhodesian Light Infantry* (Roodeport: Covos-Day, 1988), 139–40.

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required on patrol.[14] When a white sergeant in a novel by a Rhodesian Regiment (RR) veteran solemnly removes extra ammunition from his pack, saying "If I can't kill him with forty rounds ... I deserve to lose," he was making his pack even lighter than the five magazines carried by soldiers experienced in evading regulations.[15]

The AK was supposedly so easy to use that it required no adjustments in the weapon or cartridges. It had few moveable parts and was said to be easy to maintain. Many said it was superior for bush warfare because its barrel was shorter than the FN's and so did not snag in branches and vines. Its stock was retractable when made of metal and fixed when made of wood or plastic. Guerrillas preferred the plastic stocks because weapons were cached underground. Its curved, thirty-round "banana" magazine made it instantly identifiable. In terms of firing, the AK-47 was the opposite of the FN: the first downward click on the AK firing selector was for automatic fire, the second for repeating single shots.[16] Guerrillas, according to Rhodesian soldiers, tended to spray automatic fire in any surprise encounter. Rhodesian officers often assumed that guerrilla commanders encouraged wasting ammunition through extravagant bursts of automatic fire, and happily recounted the exceptional number of spent cartridges found after contacts—four hundred here, 150 fired at a doorway somewhere else. But four hundred cartridges meant that a patrol of ten, nine of whom carried automatic weapons, fired a total of eleven magazines; this may have been a sloppy strategy, or gross disobedience, but it was not an extravagant burst of fire. Moreover, guerrillas were completely dependent on the supply of ammunition to the front.[17] Rank-and-file guerrillas claimed they often fired on automatic because in the bush it was rare to get a clear shot.[18]

More than any other automatic weapon, the AK is mythologized.[19] Many authors tended to crow about its rate of fire of six hundred rounds per

[14] Paul L. Moorcraft and Peter McLaughlin, *Chimurenga! The War in Rhodesia 1965–1980* (Johannesburg: Sygma/Collins, 1982), 104; Paresh Pandya, *Mao Tse-tung and Chimurenga. An Investigation into ZANLA's Strategies* (Pretoria: Skotaville Publishers, 1988), 103–4.

[15] Tom Hampshire, *If I Should Die* (Victoria, B.C.: Tafford, 2005), 140; Vera Elderkin, *Last Rhodesian Soldiers* (Baltimore: Publish America, 2004), 128; Dennis Croukamp, *Only My Friends Call Me 'Crouks'* (Cape Town: Pseudo Publishing, 2006), 164; Charlie Warren, *At The Going Down of the Sun* (n.p.: Booksurge, 2006), 149.

[16] Angus Shaw, *Kandaya: Another Time, Another Place* (Harare: Baobab, 1983), 63–64; author's field notes, Harare, 5 July 2001. See also Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life* (London: Methuen, 1984), 165.

[17] Jim Parker, *Assignment Selous Scouts: Inside Story of a Rhodesian Special Branch Officer* (Alberton: Galago, 2006), 188–89; Daniel Carney, *The Whispering Death* (London: Corgi, 1969), 137; Moorcraft and McLaughlin, *Chimurenga!*, 105–7.

[18] Hotz, *Muzukuru*, 172.

[19] The M-16 is a close second. An automatic weapon hastily put to use in Vietnam, soldiers soon condemned it for jamming. But the U.S. Army and its manufacturers could find no fault with the gun, only its maintenance by troops. In this the M-16 is a story of unsophisticated youth rather than one of a sophisticated weapon. See Thomas L. McNaugher, *The M16 Controversies: Military Organizations and Weapons Acquisition* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

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minute, but that figure is deceptive, because any serious burst of automatic fire requires changing magazines, and this slows the rate of fire considerably. What was important about automatic weapons was not the number of bullets a gun could fire, but who controlled that fire and to what end. Automatic rifles represented both an innovation and a problem for militaries. Unlike the machine gun, which provided the firepower of forty infantry in a fixed space, automatic rifles dispersed shooting. Riflemen had always been difficult to control, even with intensive drill, because they could open and cease their fire as they chose; they were sometimes erratic, sometimes distracted, and sometimes excited. Once armed with lightweight, efficient, automatic weapons that allowed for more firepower from fewer infantry, soldiers were freed from centralized command.[20]

After World War II, infantries were thought to need a new kind of weapon for a new kind of war, and soldiers were thought to need a new way to shoot. Automatic rifles made infantries more mobile, they made them airborne—a critical factor when soldiers were moved around the countryside by helicopters—but they did not necessarily make them marksmen. This, however, was no longer considered a problem. Automatic weapons gave infantry greater range, and so they could engage an enemy they could not see but which they could pin down while their own troops advanced. This undermined command and control, since effective fire could come from anywhere. Biometrics was put to work to make effective fire more important than accurate fire. An analysis of three million casualties in World Wars I and II found that it was the degree of exposure to fire that inflicted wounds; aimed fire did not influence the manner in which the enemy was shot. Automatic weapons were never intended to be accurate in the sense of hitting a specific target. Instead, they were to produce "area fire," spraying an area with rapid, lethal fire: anyone in its path would be hit, but even if the path was too high or obstructed the fire still served its purpose by keeping the enemy from advancing. Area fire was a way of thinking about guns that confronted and contradicted traditions of marksmanship, but it became a necessity of the Cold War era, at least according to the U.S. Army, which faced AK-47s in Korea and Vietnam.[21] The Rhodesian Army, however, was slow to acknowledge the importance of automatic weapons. Indeed, it had to use a U.S. Special Forces publication on guerrilla

[20] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 232–34; see also Hew Strachen, "Training, Morale, and Modern War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, 2 (2006): 211–27.

[21] Edward Clinton Ezell, *The Great Rifle Controversy: The Search for the Ultimate Infantry Weapon from World War II to Vietnam* (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1984), 164–66, 285–87; McNaugher, *M16 Controversies*, 26–27, 52–54, 128–29; George Raudzens, "War-Winning Weapons: The Measurement of Technological Determinism in Military History," *Journal of Military History* 54, 4 (1990): 403–34.

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FIGURE 1 ZANLA guerrillas in the bush (1973 or 1974) with a NATO bazooka, a World War II German machine gun, Soviet RPGs and sniper rifles, and a Romanian AK-47. Rhodesian Army photograph in the possession of Paul Moorcraft. In Paul L. Moorcraft and Peter McLaughlin, *Chimurenga! The War in Rhodesia 1965–1980* (Johannesburg: Sygma/Collins, 1982).

warfare to identify the Russian-made automatic weapons found cached in the country in 1966.[22]

The AK, however well suited it might have been to bush warfare, was a donated weapon. It was foreign made and brought to Africa whole; no assembly was required, and no experts were necessary to explain how to use it. Rhodesian novelists reveled in their description of guerrillas' weapon caches—"countless tons of arms and equipment," plus radios and medical supplies—and the explosives they did not understand.[23] David Headrick has argued that such technologies became popular almost at once; using the example of radios, he argues that their everyday use was more important than their internal workings or their place of origin. Clapperton Mavhunga, using the example of rifles in nineteenth-century Central Africa, has shown that the very ready-to-use nature of these technologies intensified their domestication: guns were bundled into bridewealth payments, powder was kept dry in calabashes, and spent bullets were retrieved from the long grass and hammered

[22] "ZAPU Terrorist Arms, Clothing and Equipment, 27 August 1966," in papers relating to Operation Grampus, Binga District, 11–18 Aug. 1966. Papers in possession of Brig. David Heppenstall.

[23] Peter Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* (Alberton: Galago, 1973), 193; Robert Early, *A Time of Madness* (Salisbury: Graham Publishing, 1977), 110; William Rayner, *The Day of Chaminuka* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), 34.

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back into shape.[24] For Rhodesian authors, however, the AK was in "the tradition of Russian weapons: rugged, dependable and cheap," effective even after long periods without cleaning or lubrication.[25] It was so simple that illiterate peasants could operate it to great effect. The AK's simplicity and power underscores the question with which I began this article: if the AK-47 was a cheap, simple, donated weapon that required almost no training to use, why did Rhodesians, clinging to white power in the middle of Africa through a rhetoric of civilization and standards, celebrate its accuracy and praise the discipline with which it was fired?

CLEANING GUNS, CLEANING LAWNMOWERS

Guns and knowledge of them had a specific legibility in this war. There was the complaint of ZAPU recruits at their first target practice, that if they missed every shot, they were accused of being Rhodesian agents sent to undermine the guerrilla effort, but if they hit the target, they were accused of being Rhodesian agents sent to infiltrate the guerrilla army.[26] Colored conscripts, serving in transport for the Rhodesian Army, complained that they were issued "surplus old hardware" and not FNs.[27] In a favorite urban legend of white Rhodesians, a white homeowner watched his gardener repair a lawnmower. The gardener removed the cylinder and laid each part out on the grass in sequence, exactly the way someone would clean a weapon. The homeowner realized his gardener was a guerrilla sent to infiltrate the suburbs. After an intense police interrogation the gardener confessed, and an AK-47 and stash of ammunition were found nearby.[28]

The idea that Africans' knowledge of guns (or lawnmowers) was irrefutable proof of guerrilla training, most likely in exotic and socialist locales with Soviet-made weapons, emerged after Rhodesia took its own independence. Until late 1966, Rhodesian intelligence scorned guerrillas' training and their abilities to make use of it. Reports claimed that men trained in Algeria would be unlikely to carry out an ambush "in the textbook manner." Men trained in African camps were not expected to follow the textbook; they

[24] David Headrick, *Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 12; Clapperton Mavhunga, "Firearms Diffusion, Exotic and Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Lowveld Frontier, South Eastern Zimbabwe, 1870–1920," *Comparative Technology Transfer and Society* 1, 2 (2003): 201–31; see also Nicholas Rasmussen, "What Moves when Technologies Migrate? 'Software' and Hardware in the Transfer of Biological Electron Microscopy to Postwar Australia," *Technology and Culture* 40, 1 (1999): 47–73.

[25] Moorcraft and McLaughlin, *Chimurenga!*, 104–5.

[26] Mwezi Tawala and Ed Benard, *Mnokodo: Inside MK: Mwezi Twala–A Soldier's Story* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1994), 32.

[27] Charles Maviyane Davies, Harare, 29 Nov. 1989, National Archives of Zimbabwe, (NAZ)/ORAL/325.

[28] Shaw, *Kandaya*, 77; author's field notes, Harare, 5 July 2001.

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were instructed, for example, to make a smoke grenade with the powder of twelve dried chilies, twenty-four match heads, sand, and petrol. Special Branch patronized ZANU's camps in Tanzania, where instruction "lacked the sophistication of the course held in Russia or Red China." Nevertheless, ZANLA recruits heard lectures "by one of their own kind in their own language and this may have compensated for the lack of specialized instruction."[29] Well into the 1960s white authors described the Africans who fought against them as drug-crazed, blood-lusting, urban youth incapable of covering their tracks in the bush.[30] When Africans were heavily armed, as with the "Pan-African" rebels in a 1966 novel, it did them no good: "It's not the guns, gentlemen," a white farmer tells his neighbors, "it's the men behind the guns."[31] By 1967 and 1968, after the first guerrilla incursions into Rhodesia, two novels were published that marked a transformation in the descriptions of African guerrilla training. They listed what a guerrilla recruit learned in Moscow (or Peking) above and beyond firing and cleaning machine guns, and above and beyond the imaginings of Rhodesian Special Branch: "how to make explosives and how to blow up bridges and buildings and railway lines, how to tap telephones, use radio, how to use trick cameras and invisible ink."[32] Such a statement was unlike anything that had gone before, more noteworthy, perhaps, because the authors must have known how fanciful these descriptions were; the quotation is from a novel by one of the lawyers who prosecuted the first group of ZAPU guerrillas to be captured in the country; the other novel was by a policeman.[33] Captured and interrogated guerrillas from 1966–1968 described an almost hands-off training in Tanzania, in which recruits had to prepare their own food and supervise their own exercise before instructors showed up at 9 A.M. In the morning they received weapons training in which they were allowed to fire five rounds each, and in the afternoon they heard lectures on map reading.[34] The earliest first-person accounts of guerrilla training in Russia seemed sensible, if uninspired. Men were trained in command and

[29] Special Branch HQ, Salisbury, "Memorandum: Sabotage and Military Training in Tanganyika," 7 Jan. 1964; "Terrorist Training Camp, Zimbabwe African National Union (Z.A.N.U.), Intumbi Reefs, Tanzania," 28 Nov. 1966; "Terrorist Training Camp: Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (Z.A.P.U.): Baghari Camp, Algeria," 29 Nov. 1966. RAA/2001/050/1001.

[30] Robin Brown, *When the Woods Became the Trees* (London: Michael Joseph, 1965), 22–23; Mike Hoare, *Mercenary* (London, Corgi, 1967), 21–22; Carney, *Whispering Death*, 81–82; David Craven, *Mapolisa: Some Reminiscences of a Rhodesian Policeman* (Weltrevreden Park: Covos Books, 1998), 119.

[31] W. A. Ballinger, *Call It Rhodesia* (London: Howard Baker, 1966), 315.

[32] John Gordon Davis, *Hold My Hand I'm Dying* (London: Diamond Books, 1993 [1967]), 430–33. See also David Chapman, *The Infiltrators* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1968), 106, 138.

[33] Anthony Chennells, "Rhodesian Discourse, Rhodesian Novels and the Zimbabwe Liberation War," in N. Bhebe and T. Ranger, eds., *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, v. 2, (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press, 1995), 108–9.

[34] "Notes on Brief Interrogation of a Terrorist Leader, 27 August 1966," in papers relating to Operation Grampus, Binga District, 11–18 Aug. 1966, in possession of Brig. David Heppenstall.

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control, compass reading, and first aid. They learned how to assemble and disassemble rifles and were given target practice at various distances. After a few weeks they were divided into small groups, each of which received specialized training in weapons, radio and Morse code, explosives, and tactics, so they could return to Africa and train others.[35] Even so, Rhodesians seemed unwilling to believe that guerrillas might have had limited training with guns. When a captured ZAPU reported his Russian target practice—five rounds with an AK, ten rounds with an automatic pistol—it was "suspected that he fired considerably more rounds than he cared to admit."[36]

The fact of Russia, rather than target practice therein, captured the imagination of Rhodesian authors, authorities, and foreign journalists. The ZANLA recruits trained in Ghana in 1964 and Egypt in 1965 went largely unnoticed. In Rhodesian fiction the only guerrilla camps in North Africa housed splinter groups, "renegades" without recognition who had to buy their weapons on the international market.[37] Training in Russia, or China, was central to Rhodesian wartime fiction, however. Novelists imagined guerrillas falling in love with Chinese or Russian instructors, or hoping their Soviet training would lead to a desk job with the party upon their return to Africa. Novelists described guerrillas carrying Mao's *The Little Red Book* with them on patrol, and wrote of "half a million Chinese in Zambia," and of East European handlers behind African nationalists. After the war, novelists described the neutron bomb the Chinese had assembled on Zanzibar that was to liberate southern Africa.[38] But in fact only ZAPU sent men to Eastern Europe for training after about 1970, and then only seasoned cadres. These men recalled their time there with great fondness, and they found Russians unpretentious and East Germans warm.[39] In the late 1970s journalists tried to discover if the ZIPRA

[35] Statement of Gideon Ngoshi and Joseph Nyandoro, Francistown, 24 Oct. 1965, Botswana National Archives (BNA)/OP55/41, "Refugees: Individual Cases"; Statement of Tshinga Dube, Francistown, 6 Dec. 1966, BNA/OP55/58, Peoples' Caretaker Council, ZAPU and ZANU.

[36] Contact report: Operation Grampus, Annex C, "Report on the Brief Interrogation of a Terrorist Leader," 27 Aug. 1966. In the possession of Brig. David Heppenstall.

[37] Hassan Chimutengwende, "The Formation of a Guerrilla Fighter," *The Listener* 79, 2038 (18 Apr. 1968): 491–93; Martin and Johnson, *Struggle for Zimbabwe*, 83; Lloyd Burton, *The Yellow Mountain* (Salisbury: Regal Publishing, 1978), 134–35, 199–200. The Rhodesian Army was concerned that men were trained in Cuba; see "Cuban Training," report from an ex-Cuban intelligence officer, Sept. 1974, RAA/2001/086/009/143/2.

[38] Chapman, *Infiltrators*, 107; Michael Hartmann, *Game for Vultures* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 134–35; Stiff, *Rain Goddess*, 193; Tippette, *Mercenaries*, 156; Early, *Time of Madness*, 248–56; Harvey Grenville Ward, *Sanctions Buster* (Glasgow: William MacClellan Embryo, 1982), 62–63. Ward was the news announcer of the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation. He later claimed that his novel, in which a United Nations sub-committee hired the Baader-Meinhof gang to assassinate a Rhodesian sanctions buster, was "seventy-five per cent true." Harvey Grenville Ward, London, 4 June and 17 Oct. 1984, NAZ/ORAL/246.

[39] Daniel J. Kempton, *Soviet Strategy toward Southern Africa: The National Liberation Movement Connection* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 101–2; Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor, "War Stories: Guerrilla Narratives of Zimbabwe's Liberation War," *History Workshop Journal*

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they encountered had really been to Russia, and unless they could speak with certainty about the climate or the language it was assumed they had not. Instead, "Russia was the glamorous, important place to have been, a mark of selection. . . ."[40] For guerrillas, however, Russian and Chinese training had great and multiple meanings in the late 1970s, well after many ZIPRA had defected to ZANLA. In many writings about guerrillas it became commonplace for ZANLA to recall ZAPU Russian training—whether their own or not—with contempt. Russians believed in "confrontational, pitched-battle" warfare that had nothing to do with the realities of their struggle in Africa, they complained, apparently to anyone who would listen. The same men were intense in their praise for training in China, although it is not clear that any ZANLA went there after 1968 or 1969; beginning in 1970 the Chinese began to send instructors to ZANLA's camps in Tanzania. Nevertheless, several ZANLA in exile gave astounding descriptions of being trained in China, where among other things they said they were taken on fieldtrips to the caves of Hunan so they would understand the importance of history and ideology.[41]

ZANLA trained as a guerrilla army, at least in theory. According to captured guerrillas, their training camps in Tanzania in the early 1970s were chronically short of guns. There were not enough with which to train recruits, and at night automatic weapons were kept in the local police station rather than in the camp. They received much of their weapons training by demonstration, sometimes with AKs and sometimes with old British World War II guns. The rest of the time the Chinese instructors showed them how to use bayonets and knives in hand-to-hand combat. This was followed by refresher courses and drill designed to combat boredom and boost morale rather than to give everyone

57 (2004): 89–90; Andrew Nyathi with John Hoffman, *Tomorrow Is Built Today: Experiences of War, Colonialism, and the Struggle for Collective Co-operatives in Zimbabwe* (Harare: Anvil Press, 1990), 25–27.

[40] David Caute, *Under the Skin: The Last Days of White Rhodesia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 19–21. A few fictive guerrillas tried to make their comrades admit they had been trained by Chinese in Africa, not in China, see William Raynor, *The Day of Chaminuka* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 13.

[41] Raeburn, *We Are Everywhere: Narratives from Rhodesian Guerrillas* (New York: Random House, 1979), x, 46–50, 108; Peter Wilkinson, *Msasa* (Warksworth, N.Z.: Peter Wilkinson, 1992), 98. Both Raeburn and Wilkinson, the latter a Commonwealth observer in the 1980 election, based their work on conversations with former guerrillas. Raeburn's book, however, was based on his conversations with Rhodesian exiles in London in the 1970s, men who seem to be telling him stories, which he then rewrote as "facts presented in the language of fiction." Rhodesians insisted that in 1966 there were sixty guerrillas training in China, and fourteen in the USSR. Special Branch HQ, Salisbury, "Military Training of African Nationalists," 7 Mar. 1966, RAA/ 2001/086/1050/1001; Provincial Special Branch Officer, Salisbury to Mashonaland Provinces and PSBO, Matabeleland, "Chinese Aid to Terrorist Organizations," 18 Aug. 1970, RAA/2001/086/102/141.

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experience with guns.[42] These instructors were a staple of Rhodesian fiction, sometimes urging caution and sometimes insisting on foolhardy attacks.[43]

There were even fewer guns in ZANLA's camps in Mozambique.[44] Most young male recruits there spent entire afternoons reciting the names of all the parts of a sub-machine gun, "like school children," each standing when called upon and shouting "Barrel, piston, cover, hand grip, chamber. . .." After weeks of such training, men were finally "heading for the gun." They were instructed to make wooden replicas of AKs. Most cadres trained with such replicas until they were sent back into Rhodesia.[45] When they finally left their camps in Mozambique—perhaps thinking, as at least one cadre did, that they had been transformed into agile, armed, combat-ready militants—they traveled unarmed. They were issued guns only when they entered Rhodesia, where they were told that a gun was to be used "on the enemy and for the protection of the masses," and never turned on one's comrades.[46] Once on patrol in Rhodesia, at least in the mid-1970s, not every ZANLA carried a gun. Many in the rank and file carried Soviet- and Czech-made Simonev single-shot rifles, often with only a few clips of ammunition, but most carried land mines and stick grenades. Only officers carried Tokarev pistols, which became a favorite souvenir for Rhodesian troops and a few guerrillas.[47]

[42] "Terrorist Training Camps, Tanzania, 7 May 1974: Interrogation of Captured ZANLA Terrorist Maxwell Mushonga (Code Name Evermore Nyasha)," RAA 2001/086/009/143; Raeburn, *We Are Everywhere*, 41; Martin and Johnson, *Struggle for Zimbabwe*, 84; Shimmer Chinodya, *Harvest of Thorns* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), 114–15.

[43] Tippette, *Mercenaries*, 225–26; Anthony Trew, *Towards the Tamarind Trees* (London, Collins, 1970), 31–32, 107; Peter Armstrong, *Operation Zambezi. The Raid into Zambia* (Salisbury, Welston Press, 1979), 230–31; Sylvia Bond Smith, *Ginette* (Bulawayo: Black Eagle Press, 1980), 79–80. For Cubans training ZANLA in explosives only, see C. E. Dibb, *Spotted Soldiers* (Salisbury: Leo Publications, 1978), 32.

[44] Only a "handful" of recruits were trained with sophisticated weapons or surface-to-air missiles: "If we were going to train everybody on such a gun . . . [then] who would be fighting, because it is going to take some time for one to know the technicalities of such guns." Lovemore Chabata, Harare, 7 Aug. 1987, NAZ/ORAL/264.

[45] I. V. Mazorodze, *Silent Journey from the East* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1987), 131; Charles Samupindi, *Pawns* (Harare: Baobab, 1992), 86; Chinodya, *Harvest of Thorns*, 115–16; author's field notes, Harare, 6 Aug. 2006. Women in the camps in Mozambique were lectured when they were issued guns: "A gun is not an object for you to use as an instrument of showing off, neither is it a certificate that you are equal to men comrades. A gun is only for killing the fascist soldiers . . . and the eradication of racial discrimination. . .." *African Freedom Fighters Speak for Themselves: ZANLA Cadre's Experience, ZANLA Women's Detachment*, pamphlet (Toogaloo, MS: Freedom Information Service, 1975), 11, Africana Collection 605/23/426, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

[46] Notes on briefing by Assistant Commander Mike Edden O/C SB, Operation Hurricane, 3 Nov. 1976, Michael Holman materials, Borthwick Historical Institute, University of York, RSF 1; Mazorodze, *Silent Journey*, 137.

[47] Military Intelligence Directorate, Salisbury, Tembe Training Camp, Target Dossier, 14 Nov. 1977, RAA 2001/086/042/290; Early, *Time of Madness*, 103; Raynor, *Day of Chaminuka*, 33–34; Alexander Kanengoni, *Echoing Silences* (Harare: Baobab, 1997), 21; Hotz, *Muzukuru*, 171–72; Cocks, *Fireforce*, 141; author's field notes, Harare, 6 Aug. 2006.

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ZANLA was able to replace the obsolete weapons they had given to the rank and file only when they began to receive large numbers of automatic weapons from the USSR in early 1978.[48]

Most ZANLA rank and file—at least those who wrote novels or talked to novelists—did not think they had mastered automatic weapons. They described spraying automatic weapon fire as an act of desperation, not strategy. One ZANLA patrol did not heed their commander's order to hold their fire, but fired with such long bursts of their AKs that they had to switch magazines and soon ran out of ammunition.[49] The hero of a novel by former ZANLA Alexander Kanengoni described his patrol driven into an ambush by circling helicopters, and the men shooting "wildly" and soon running out of ammunition. Hearing his comrades' cries "he no longer cared about anything or anyone" and was "seized" by a strange emotion: "He pushed the safety lock of his assault rifle on to full automatic and stood up and fired from the hip, spraying the other bank with fire."[50]

ZIPRA was trained as a conventional army, but they too were often short of guns. Many cadres were trained in Rhodesia by comrades who had trained abroad, but more often than not they trained without guns.[51] A few ZIPRA trained on heavy artillery and anti-aircraft guns, but most rank and file, including those who considered themselves "a well-trained soldier with discipline," did not have regular experience in handling the weapons they would shoot. There were simply not many AKs available to recruits in the 1960s and early 1970s, and when there were, there was not always enough ammunition for serious target practice.[52] Most of the time cadres were taught by demonstration. ZAPU's army in Zambia was larger and better armed than Zambia's own, which was a constant source of tension between ZAPU and the Zambian government. Zambia's Rhodesian-born minister of home affairs tried to control, or, failing that, to monitor, the weapons donated to ZIPRA. This did not work, of course, but he did pressure ZIPRA into keeping their guns in the Zambian Army's armory, which meant that ZIPRA trained there could only practice with automatic weapons when the Zambians allowed them to. To maintain a supply of sophisticated weapons and artillery, ZIPRA commanders constantly moved their tanks and anti-aircraft missiles around the country or out of it altogether. By their own accounts, ZIPRA did not want Zambia to know the

[48] "Rhodesia I: More Trouble Inside ZANU," *Africa Confidential* 19, 7 (31 Mar. 1978): 1.

[49] Mafuranhunzi Gumbo [Inus Daneel], *Guerrilla Snuff* (Harare: Baobab, 1995), 33.

[50] Kanengoni, *Echoing Silences*, 32–33.

[51] Liberation Support Movement (LSM) Information Center, *Zimbabwe ZAPU. Interviews in Depth, 2. George Silundika*, (Richmond, B.C.: LSM Press, 1974), 4–5.

[52] "ZIPRA Tactic Papers," 23 May 1977, RAA 2001/086/101/869. Among the available guns were a dozen Thompson sub-machine guns; see "Summaries of Operation Turmoil," Mar. 1978, RAA 2001/086/002/856; "Main ZAPU Weapons Armoury," July 1977, RAA 2001/086/050/101; Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 146.

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extent of the sophisticated weapons they had. But Zambian ignorance seems unlikely, if for no other reason than ZIPRA propaganda routinely announced the destruction of planes and tanks on the ground in Rhodesia, and ZANU officials in Zambia regularly complained that the Russians "showered" ZIPRA with tanks.[53]

ZIPRA's use of sophisticated weapons, then, was well known. For the most part, Rhodesian authors praised ZIPRA's soldiering skills—the same skills ZANLA disdained—while ZIPRA found it difficult to represent itself as unskilled or as using primitive weapons. Rhodesians condemned ZIPRA for shooting down a civilian aircraft with a Russian Strella surface-to-air missile in 1978, but they did so with grudging admiration for the heat seeking technologies and infrared devices operated by a single man.[54] ZIPRA insiders, on the other hand, tried desperately to deny that it had been a deliberate shot. Former guerrilla Eliakim Sibanda insisted the missile actually missed its intended target, a South African Airways plane carrying South Africa's minister of defense.[55] Joshua Nkomo, chairman of ZAPU and commander of its army, claimed he could not let Zambia know ZIPRA had such weapons. To protect ZIPRA from Zambia, he told a BBC interviewer that the plane had been brought down with stones and spears, which infuriated Rhodesians even more.[56]

After the war, ZIPRA intelligence was to doubt the wisdom of its reliance on heavy weapons, which, they now believed, exposed the weakness of ZIPRA's tactics and training and, perhaps most of all, their Soviet ties. While ZIPRA had enough mortars and skilled cadres to assault a garrison, they did not have enough trained infantry in Rhodesia to press home the advantages these weapons gave them.[57] Nevertheless, individual ZIPRA who had been trained in sophisticated weapons were proud that they had the technology to

[53] Author's field notes, Harare, 3 Aug. 2006; African National Council of Zimbabwe, ZPRA Combat Diary, May-Dec. 1976, mimeo (London, 1977). Terence Ranger Papers, ZIPRA/ZIPA, Rhodes House, Oxford; Peter L. Moorcraft, *A Short Thousand Years: The End of Rhodesia's Rebellion* (Salisbury: Galaxie, 1979), 168.

[54] Peter Armstrong, *Operation Zambezi: The Raid into Zambia* (Salisbury: Welston Press, 1979), 44–45; Pat Scully, *Exit Rhodesia: From UDI to Marxism* (Ladysmith, South Africa: Cotswold Press, 1984), 118; Lane Flint, *God's Miracles versus Marxist Terrorists: The Epic True Stories of the Men and Victims who Fought the Rhodesian and South West African Wars* (Ladybrand, South Africa: Masterplan Publishers, 1985), 200–4.

[55] Eliakim Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2005), 191–92.

[56] Caute, *Under the Skin*, 275–76; Nkomo, *My Life*, 167; Nyathi, *Tomorrow Is Built*, 33. A few months later Nkomo admitted in a BBC interview with David Frost that ZIPRA shot the plane down. Alexandre Binda with Brig. David Heppenstall, *Masoja: The History of the Rhodesian African Rifles and Its Forerunner, the Rhodesian Native Regiment* (Johannesburg: 30° South), 352 n.

[57] Jeremy Brickhill, "Daring to Storm the Heavens: The Military Strategy of ZAPU, 1976–1979," in N. Bhebe and T. Ranger, eds., *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, v. 1 (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press, 1995), 48–72. For weapons, see Kempton, *Soviet Strategy*, 106.

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FIGURE 2. ZIPRA guerrillas examining a Rhodesian helicopter shot down during a Rhodesian raid on Victory Camp, Zambia, 1979. Rhodesian Army photograph in the possession of Paul Moorcraft. In Paul Moorcraft and Peter McLaughlin, *The Rhodesian War: A Military History* (Barnsely, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Books, 2008)

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outmaneuver Rhodesian forces. Rank-and-file ZIPRA recalled their first skirmishes with perhaps more awe than pride. One man admitted that he had "never believed" his gun would really work. But once under fire he overcame his fear, switched his rifle to automatic, and killed two white soldiers. "After that I became brave and knew these people could be killed by anyone."[58]

WOODEN GUNS AND FLASHLIGHTS

Most ZANLA commanders and almost all of its high command considered training with wooden replicas of guns to be poor training, though it is not altogether clear why. The object of drill is to condition soldiers to perform, to continue shooting when exhausted, under fire, or injured; drill makes sure that soldiers, however fatigued, shoot at their enemies and not at their comrades. For this reason, ZIPRA's African instructors trained men to become familiar with the sounds of battle rather than to shoot with any accuracy; they were said to fire an AK from right behind a recruit.[59] Automatic weapons, and the nature of area fire, were well suited to the training-by-demonstration practiced in ZIPRA and ZANLA camps. It was important to train recruits to dismantle and reassemble a gun by rote, and to habituate them to the weight of the gun, and it did not matter if guns were wooden replicas or real. That wooden guns could not be aimed or fired should have made them an acceptable way to train recruits to use automatic weapons. Nevertheless, the ZANLA high command had grave reservations about men who had trained with wooden replicas. They may have learned this disdain from their Red Army instructors who recalled their own disastrous training with wooden guns in 1939, or it may have been based on the records they struggled to maintain of killed and wounded.[60] When ZANLA officers needed its best soldiers, whether to hunt down mutineers in 1975 or to form the short-lived Zimbabwe Peoples' Army, they took men from their camps in Tanzania who had trained with more guns than had cadres trained in Mozambique.[61]

Rhodesians throughout the 1960s and 1970s prided themselves on training police with flashlights rather than pistols. Switching them on with the motion of a finger patterned the reflex to fire before men were exposed to the noise of the gun. By the mid-1970s this had been introduced as a way to practice with FNs, in part designed as a way to control flinching, and in part so soldiers could practice without ammunition.[62] The Rhodesian Army, which was never as poor as it later claimed to have been, became concerned about saving

[58] Alexander and McGregor, "War Stories," 91, 93–94; see also Hotz, *Muzukuru*, 234–35.

[59] Hotz, *Muzukuru*, 89.

[60] Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 66–67; author's field notes, Harare, 6 Aug. 2006.

[61] Author's field notes, Harare, 16 July 2001, and 6 Aug. 2006; Parker, *Assignment Selous Scouts*, 133.

[62] Author's field notes, Harare, 2 Aug. 2006.

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ammunition in 1977, when police and guard forces were ordered to do so.[63] The infantry had long been trained to conserve ammunition and to shoot at targets rather than spraying fire. A number of white Rhodesian youths went so far as to claim that all this military weapon training was irrelevant to them since their fathers had already taught them to shoot. They were indeed excellent marksmen, although their every shot resonated with all the tensions of filial duty.[64]

What can all this mean? How do men who were crack shots long before their national service come to see wooden-gun-toting guerrillas as men carrying new AKs, proficient in blowing up bridges, trick cameras, and invisible ink? There are exceptions to this perspective, of course, as in the novel in which guerrillas favor bayonets because they are bloodier, or the former Rhodesian Light Infantry who insisted guerrillas could not shoot straight.[65] But most war memoirs and novels bring home the same point: Rhodesians imagined guerrillas to be well trained and equipped in the art of war. This even though guerrillas complained they were not. Why did Rhodesians have this view? Surely there was a strong desire on their part, intensified by settler myths, to have a worthy enemy, but did that worth require invisible ink and trick cameras? Rhodesians' worthy foes seemed to have been a moving target that shifted from 1968, when Rhodesian army officers complained that many of the ZANLA who entered the country showed no initiative, to the mid-1970s, when captured guerrillas reported weapons training by demonstration and minimal target practice, to 1979, when white soldiers routinely failed to engage guerrillas or command their troops to fire at them.[66] Guerrillas, however, did not think themselves badly trained or poor soldiers. Their frequent complaints and uncertainties about their fire discipline (that they went on automatic too often, too late, too thoughtlessly) suggests that they were trained to have much better fire discipline than they managed in battle.

[63] David Lemon, *Never Quite A Soldier: A Policeman's War 1971–1983* (Stroud: Albida Books, 2000), 132; Maj. G. R. Turner to Secretary of Defence, Salisbury, 31 Dec. 1975, RAA 2001/086/029/1112; R. W. Tait, Secretary of Defence, Salisbury, to Army HQ, re: procurement, 14 July 1978, RAA 2001/086/016/1101. By 1978 there was a shortage of guns. Several branches of the security forces, including police, had too few weapons for a full intake of national servicemen. They could not use captured weapons for training because infantry and counterinsurgency units were given all the AKs the Rhodesian Army had. Many other AKs, and Tokarevs, were "unaccounted for," taken as souvenirs or, some insisted, sold back to guerrillas. See Army HQ to Comops HQ, "Weapons Re-allocation," 18 May 1978; M. D. York, Sup., BSAP to Comops, Salisbury, "Terrorist Arms and Equipment: Training Aids," 5 Jan. 1979, RAA 2001/086/024/925; Ron Reid-Daly, as told to Peter Stiff, *Selous Scouts: Top Secret War* (Alberton: Galago, 1982), 421; author's field notes, Pretoria, 29 July 2004.

[64] Doke, *First Born*, 34–35; Trew, *Tamarind Trees*, 86–87; Dan Wylie, *Dead Leaves: Two Years in the Rhodesian Army* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), 10.

[65] Stiff, *Rain Goddess*, 149–50, 156. On poor guerrilla shooting, see Alexandra Fuller, *Scribbling the Cat: Travels with an African Soldier* (New York, Penguin, 2004), 146.

[66] Heppenstall, *Masoja*, 226; Contact reports: Operation Repulse, A2 Coy, 8RR, Nov. 1979, RAA 2001/086/035/1341. See also Wylie, *Dead Leaves*, 148–49.

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By the time the war was well underway, the vision of skilled guerrillas fighting with sophisticated weapons had become the norm. Guerrillas were almost always said to be better shots than the Rhodesian African Rifles, even though by the 1960s the RAR was the most experienced infantry battalion in the country. Created out of the Rhodesia Native Regiment in 1940, the RAR had served in World War II, Malaya, and in the army of the Central African Federation (1953–1964). By the time the Federation was dissolved in 1964 Rhodesia had raised an all-white infantry—the Rhodesian Light Infantry—to be prepared for the dangers of decolonization on its borders. When Rhodesia declared itself independent in 1965, army officers asked to form two more African battalions but the government refused. In 1966 there was but one RAR battalion, and four rifle companies. In 1974 a second battalion was formed, followed by a third in 1977, and a fourth in 1978. Members of the latter, 4RAR, never saw action as a battalion, but were immediately integrated into white reserve units of the Rhodesia Regiment (RR), while those in 3RAR were increasingly given extended postings with independent companies of the Regiment.[67] During the war, RAR officers seemed to think that training with guns did not make skilled soldiers: they claimed that African soldiers fired high when they were "excited." After the war, they joked that the only RAR fire that killed guerrillas was that of the troop commander "because he was white," or that of the platoon sergeant major "because he had fifteen or twenty years of experience behind him."[68] Such ideas filtered down through the ranks. A young Rhodesian Air Force pilot who had little contact with any infantry unit claimed the RAR "were good reliable blokes but their operating was pretty shit.. . ."[69] The Rhodesian Intelligence Corps, who were biologists and Ph.D. candidates in the humanities tasked to analyze situation reports from the war, found the reverse to be true, that by every possible measure 1RAR was the most effective unit in the Rhodesian Army. They had the best performance in operational areas, the most kills, and the fewest unit deaths. The 2RAR ranked third, only slightly less effective than 1RLI.[70]

Nevertheless, 1RAR and 2RAR received scant praise in Rhodesian Army contact reports. These were detailed summaries of each incident in which fire

[67] Moorcraft and McLaughlin, *Chimurenga!*, 45–46; Geoffrey Bond, *The Incredibles: The Story of the First Battalion, the Rhodesian Light Infantry* (Salisbury: Sarum Imprint, 1977), 22–35; Luise White, "Civic Virtue, National Service and the Family: Conscription in Rhodesia," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37, 1 (2004): 103–2; Zoe Flood, Brothers-in-Arms? White and Black Soldiers in the Rhodesian Army: The Attitudes of White Soldiers towards their Black Comrades in the 1970s Guerrilla War in Rhodesia. B.A. thesis, Oxford University, 2005, 9–11; author's field notes, Harare, 2 Aug. 2006.

[68] Author's field notes, Barton-on-Sea, England, 31 July 2003; Flood, Brothers-in-Arms?, 35.

[69] Mark Edward Dawson, London, 1983, NAZ/ORAL/232.

[70] Author's field notes, Pretoria, 28 and 29 July 2004; Durban, 21 July 2006; Harare, 2 Aug. 2006.

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was exchanged with guerrillas, and each one passed through the chain of command from sub-unit commanders to brigadiers, who each commented from a different vantage point. Common complaints in the late 1960s were that RAR ran away from contacts, or got lost on patrol.[71] A sampling of contact reports for 1978 reveals that Africans' shooting was frequently described as "ineffectual," "poor," or "dismal."[72] RAR patrols "showed a distinct lack of aggression"; their firing was "not good enough," and "not up to standard," and they "hit the ground as soon as shooting started." One patrol disregarded clear orders and shot a guerrilla as he tried to surrender, another did not heed whispered commands to begin firing, and another initiated fire without orders, and even then "it was haphazard and not aimed."[73] Officers in the 2RAR in their diaries and in fiction complained about "mediocre shooting" by those few men who actually fired their weapons in contacts.[74]

In contrast, guerrilla shooting and fire discipline were described with reverence in contact reports. ZANLA, trained in guerrilla warfare, never sought out battles; they were especially skilled at withdrawing: gunners would cover their comrades' escape with "accurate and effective fire." Returning fire on a riverbank, three guerrillas walked slowly, "in a most disciplined manner with one firing and the other two moving." Delaying parties fired on advancing troops from 400 meters away. Sub-unit commanders frequently noted the degree of "aggressiveness, accurate fire, and orderly drills in withdrawing" of guerrillas. One wrote that if an RAR patrol had "displayed the same degree of firing ability" as the guerrillas did, the ZANLA patrol "would not have made it."[75] Published materials were no less keen on the guerrillas. Their guns were kept in good condition, and their fire was "extremely accurate," and "landed right on target." They followed orders and maintained "total control" over their ambushes.[76]

[71] Heppenstall, *Masoja*, 219, 227.

[72] Contact reports: Operation Repulse, C Coy, 2RR, Aug. 1977, RAA 2001/086/181/1400; Operation Thrasher, 6 (Indep) Coy RAR, June 1978, Jan. 1979, RAA 2001/086/008/1339.

[73] Contact reports: Operation Repulse, Sp Cdo, 4 (Indep) Coy, RAR; C Coy, 2RAR, Jan. 1978, Sept. 1978, RAA 2001/086/181/1400; Operation Tangent, 1 (Indep) Coy, RAR, Dec. 1978, Sept. 1978, RAA 2001/086/142/1336; Operation Hurricane, C2 Coy, 1RR, June 1978, RAA, 2001/086/027/1337; Operation Thrasher, A Coy, 4RR, Nov. 1978, RAA 2001/096/008/1339.

[74] Alan Thrush, *Of Land and Spirits* (Guernsey: Transition Publishing, 1997), 318; J.R.T. Wood, *The War Diaries of Andre Dennison* (Gibraltar: Ashanti Publishing, 1989), 194, 210, 243.

[75] Contact report: Operation Hurricane, A Coy 1RR, Aug. 1978; A Coy, 1RAR, Sept. 1978, RAA 2001/086/027/1337; Contact report: Operation Repulse, Fire Force Chiredzu, 2RAR, Aug. 1976, RAA 2001/086/213/1139; Contact report: Operation Repulse, Sp Coy, 2RAR, Aug. 1978, RAA 2001/086/142/1336. A few years earlier, the Rhodesian Army had similar praise for FRELIMO. Contact reports: Operation Hurricane, 1Cdo 1RLI, Aug. 1973; SAS, Feb. 1974, RAA 2001/086/213/1139.

[76] Wood, *War Diaries*, 35, 146, 299; Parker, *Assignment Selous Scouts*, 143, 188, 193; Cocks, *Fireforce*, 162, 216; Richard Gledhill, *One Commando: Rhodesia's Last Years; The Guerrilla War* (Weltevreden Park: Covos-Day, 2001 [1998]), 82, 117; Stu Taylor, *Lost in Africa* (Johannesburg: 30° South, 2007), 93.

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THE NOISE OF THE GUN

Why do some Africans shoot accurately and some dismally? The reasons could not be racial; Rhodesians found no physiological reasons Africans could not shoot. But the only reason guerrillas were good shots seemed to be they had trained in Russia or China. Rhodesian African soldiers could not shoot straight because of the technological constraints of their cultures and histories. Lt. Col. Ron Reid-Daly, founder of the Selous Scouts and a man who wrote contemptuously of the Rhodesian Army's ideas about African soldiers, was shocked by the "abysmally poor standard of shooting" in the RAR. It was "a quite incredible experience" for someone like himself, "who had spent almost his entire service with European troops, to witness for the first time, the unbelievably appalling standard of musketry of the volunteer African soldiers," even though they were experienced soldiers. There was nothing wrong with African eyesight, he insisted: Africans had better eyesight than the average white Rhodesian and had much better peripheral vision, especially when on patrol. African shooting, Reid-Daly surmised, had nothing to do with innate African qualities, but "something to do with the gun itself, which was a much more alien weapon to an African than it was to a European." Something, most likely the noise of firing, gave Africans "an ingrained fear of the weapon" and they could not control their "natural flinching reaction." None of this was natural, wrote Reid-Daly. The best African shootists he had ever seen were the Portuguese Flechas.[77] Reid-Daly was not alone. Former RAR officers interviewed in 2005 claimed that their African troops could not "shoot very straight." Again, this was because of African culture and history, and nothing else. Africans had limited encounters with guns, and had not seen enough movies or television to be familiar with guns, so they were unprepared for the weapons' kick or noise.[78]

The problem of African shooting was said to be particularly acute as the RAR expanded in wartime. Rarely was any explanation given for poor RAR shooting, but when one was, it was guerrilla conduct. One fictional guerrilla informs a journalist that his men have let the RAR know, "if they don't fire on us, we won't fire on them."[79] In 1978, an RAR officer patiently explained why his men did not fire on guerrillas leaving a mission school. It was known that the guerrillas frequented the girls' dormitory on weekends, and

[77] Reid-Daly, *Selous Scouts*, 68–69. Fletchas ('Arrows') were Portuguese pseudo-gangs, originally recruited in Angola in the 1960s and formed in Mozambique in 1972. By 1974 many sought refuge in Rhodesia where they were considered an ideal group with which to start the Mozambique National Resistance Movement. Ken Flower, *Serving Secretly: Rhodesia's CIO Chief on Record* (Alberton: Galago, 1987), 300–2; Operating Coordinating Committee Minutes, 19 June 1974, 2 July 1974, RAA2001/086/237/143.

[78] Flood, Brothers-in-Arms?, 35.

[79] Meredith Cutlack, *Blood Running South* (London: Collins, 1972), 175. This book was banned in Rhodesia. See Chennells, "Rhodesian Discourse," 118.

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the soldiers did not want to risk shooting civilians or children, so they held their fire.[80] Africans' kinship with other Africans was only half the discursive battle, however; the other half was Africans' kinship with Rhodesian whites, how it was constituted, and how it cleaved. Whatever the statistics about their effectiveness, the RAR could never quite become the equals of white soldiers, but this was not because of race. It was because of their culture and history and lack of exposure to technology. RAR could be made into good soldiers, perhaps not as good as whites but at least as good as the guerrillas they fought. In 1978, David Caute, reporting for the *Observer*, watched a passing out parade of RAR with a white officer, who told him, "The day a group of terrorists pass out like that will be the day I'll start to worry."[81] The most romantic and technologically aware version of this is from a novel by Alan Thrush, himself a 2RAR officer. Rhodesia's "rugged, rain-soaked beauty" was "the birthplace of the enemy, and of the RAR." How, then, could white men, born in hospitals, well fed and well served by indoor plumbing who only saw the bush "with detached interest" from "the shelter of their parents' car," fight on the same side as Africans, men who "lived easily among the wild animals of the bush" and who bore the "physical rigours of the war very easily indeed"? How indeed? It required that whites be trained to have the physical stamina of Africans, rather than training Africans in the sophisticated ways of whites.[82] Indeed, all Selous Scouts, black and white, were required to take a training course in living off the land that was "mainly concerned with turning a European into an African . . . it ignored the African's natural advantage. He already was one."[83]

The noise of the gun, indoor plumbing, and trying to train white men to walk miles to fetch water all disrupt ideas about race in this, the most racially charged of liberation struggles. Moreover, they disrupt racial stereotypes of twentieth-century wars: if political loyalties, not racial identities, determine qualities and skills, how do we understand ideas that Gurkhas had preternaturally keen hearing, that Japanese were too myopic to fly, or that the Irish loved a good fight?[84] But here we seem to hit the proverbial brick wall: if white ideas about African shooting were not about race, what were they about? I suggest that these ideas may flow from the barrel of a specific gun, not ideas about race or about skills specific to races. Daniel Headrick has argued that

[80] Contact report: Operation Trasher, 4 (Indep) Coy RAR, July 1978, RAA 2001/086/008/1339.

[81] Caute, *Under the Skin*, 190.

[82] Thursh, *Of Land and Spirits*, 156–57.

[83] Reid-Daly, *Selous Scouts*, 74. In a revised and expanded version of this memoir, Reid-Daly amended the wording: the African "already was one, as was the enemy." Lt. Col. Ron Reid-Daly, *Pamwwe Chete: The Legend of the Selous Scouts* (Weltevreden Park: Covos-Day, 1999), 68.

[84] John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 99–103; Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing; Face to Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Basic Books, 1999), 106–7.

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the complexity of nineteenth-century technology encouraged racist thinking: as tools and machines became more complex, they required specialists to operate them; natives were unable to participate in the mechanics of domination.[85] In this liberation war, the simplicity and portability of automatic weapons may have discouraged racist ideas about guerrilla shooting. For Rhodesians, the FN was a white man's gun, "temperamental," in need of special sights and weights to improve it. Every Rhodesian knew the FN was hard to use, but there were no cultural reasons why white soldiers could not learn to do so: all they needed was frequent target practice.[86] What was important for Rhodesian thinking about the AK—thinking that began to take shape in the 1960s—was that it was a donated weapon, proof of guerrillas' access to the evil spaces of the Kremlin and Hunan. The internationalism of the weapon seems to have trumped ideas about how easy it was to use. Rhodesian fiction made this point again and again; several novels included scenes in which the young recruit is transformed by being handed an AK in Moscow in China. One of them recalls its import in Vietnam as he holds the gun for the first time.[87]

In short, the noise of the gun might have terrified Africans who fought for Rhodesia but not those who had crossed the border to Mozambique, Zambia, or Russia. Did these men lose their fear of guns and technology-deprived histories simply by changing, or even asserting, a political loyalty? Absolutely. While the Africans who fought for Rhodesia flinched, the Africans who traveled, in body or in spirit, to Moscow and Mozambique did not; they became the cosmopolitans who had learned to manage sophisticated weapons. It did not matter that the most iconic of these weapons required no special skills to operate. But if such men turned and fought for Rhodesia, as did many in the Selous Scouts, they returned to their old, poor shooting ways.[88] When RAR defected and joined guerrillas, they became much more skilled at soldiering: they led attacks that shot down helicopters, or they gave commandos their best firefight of the war.[89]

Guerrillas, however, were not so certain that their training (or heading for training with) guns made them skilled and sophisticated. They were justly proud of their training abroad, their firepower, and their possession and

[85] Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress.*

[86] Contact reports: Operation Sable, 3 Trp, SAS, Sept. 1972; 1Cdo, 1RLI, Oct. 1972, Operation Hurricane; 1Cdo, 1RLI, May 1974; 3Cdo, 1RLI, Sept. 1975, RAA 2001/086/213/1139; Operation Hurricane, 1Cdo 1RLI, Mar. 1978, RAA 2001/086/027/1337; Operation Repulse, Sp Cdo 1RLI, Oct. 1977, RAA 2001/086/181/1400; Operation Thrasher, 1Coy, 4RR, Dec. 1978, Apr. 1979, RAA 2001/096/008/1339; Operation Repulse, A2 Coy, 8RR, Nov. 1979, RAA 2001/086/035/1341. See also Wylie, *Dead Leaves*, 148–49.

[87] Chapman, *Infiltrators*, 47; Stiff, *Rain Goddess*, 131; Ivan Smith, *Come Break a Spear* (Bulawayo: Black Eagle Press, 1980), 157–58.

[88] Reid-Daly liked to boast that he commanded soldiers who had not only trained in Rhodesia but "in Russia, Cuba, China, and Bulgaria as well"; *Selous Scouts*, 180.

[89] Warren, *Going Down of the Sun*, 231–32; author's field notes, Harare, 2 Aug. 2006.

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mastery of sophisticated weapons, but these were part and parcel of political parties and political loyalties; they were not necessarily identified with the world of foreign places and ideas. The Special Branch who scorned ZANLA's Tanzanian camps, where men were trained "by one of their own kind, in their own language" articulated the very point they missed, that guerrillas loved these technologies and their skills to manage them in large part because they were provided by Africans, at home. One ZIPRA veteran told Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor that going for military training was his "first time to board an aeroplane and I felt, Oh! ZAPU is great!"[90] In their own writings, no guerrillas seemed to think that what was great about the AK was that it was Soviet made. It is possible that the weapon, available in many more countries than it was manufactured in, was a truly global weapon, and its users may have lost all sense of its place of origin or manufacture. The AK is a technology that lost all connection to the place from which it was transferred; it was fully domesticated and made local.[91] Guerrillas' accounts of firing blindly, of running out of ammunition, of guns jamming, or of moving sophisticated missiles beyond the gaze of Zambians, were ways of domesticating automatic weapons; these were the genial complaints about sophisticated weapons that cadres used every day, and the flaws known only to insiders.

CONCLUSION

Automatic weapons, rocket propelled grenades, and even anti-aircraft guns did not seem to overwhelm cadres in Zimbabwe's liberation war. There seems to have been no concern with coming to terms with the power and violence of these weapons in the ways that have been so impressively documented in World War I scholarship. There, the sheer force of bombardment generated a literature of soldiers struggling for control.[92] In Zimbabwe's liberation struggle—where men on patrol had far more mobility than infantry in the trenches—guerrillas were proud of their sophisticated weapons. The cadres who spoke authoritatively about Che, Vo Nguyen Giap, or the Algerian revolution knew that the AK, in actuality or its wooden form, was an icon of the struggle before it was in any cadres' hands. Once it was in their hands, however, it was an object of local meaning and everyday life. After the war,

[90] Alexander and McGregor, "War Stories," 87.

[91] A recent popular history of the AK argues precisely that, that it is the local street price of the weapon, not its transnational genealogy, which marks the degree of social order in a country. Larry Kahaner, *AK-47: The Weapon that Changed the Face of War* (New York: John Wiley, 2007), 193.

[92] See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Place, 1989), 345–401; Mary Habeck, "Technology in the First World War: The View from Below," in Jay Winter, Geoffrey Parker, and Mary Habeck, eds., *The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 99–131; Smith, *Embattled Self*, 43–55.

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a few Rhodesian authors alluded to this, such as the former Rhodesian policeman whose short story describes a young guerrilla pulling his AK-47 close to his chest: "Before only police and soldiers had guns but now he had one too."[93] Guerrillas who wrote or spoke to people who recorded their words were even more personal. A fictive ZIPRA complained to his comrades that he smashed his watch the first time he shot a Rhodesian soldier, while a non-fiction ZIPRA recalled the change in his school friend—he became "curt and formal"—when he became a weapons instructor.[94]

Why, then, did Rhodesians so praise their enemies' skills with weapons that they understood were easy to use? And why did they praise them with more enthusiasm than that accorded Mau Mau in Kenya, rebel armies in southern Sudan, and other African soldiers? The reasons have to do with the both the novelty and genealogy of the AK-47 in 1960s and 1970s. For Rhodesians, the AK was more than an effective weapon; it was a demonstrable link to communism and the Afro-Arab bloc. For guerrillas, the AK was a weapon with a rich genealogy, one that placed the local struggle in a proud lineage: how easy or difficult an AK was to shoot was beside the point. For both Rhodesian white and Zimbabwean African authors, communist-made automatic weapons discomfited ideas about race: the skills and sophistication of African soldiers and guerrillas were not innate or even hereditary, but were qualities that were bundled into political loyalties and affiliations. Rhodesians insisted that every AK was a link to Moscow, while guerrillas were elated by this weapon provided them by other Africans.

[93] Derek Huggins, *Stained Earth* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2004), 93.
[94] Hotz, *Muzukuru*, 264; Gumbo, *Guerrilla Snuff*, 32–33; Chinodya, *Harvest of Thorns*, 116.

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