

### **MILITARY CHRONICLE OF SOUTH WEST AFRICA (1915 - 1988)**

Compiled by Col C.J. Nöthling and published in the South African Defence Force Review 1989

#### **Introduction**

The acceptance of UNSCR 435/78 (Resolution 435) by the Security Council of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) in September 1978, was the prelude to an independent South West Africa/Namibia (SWA). Notwithstanding the optimistic prospect that SWA would become independent by the end of 1978, the implementation of a settlement plan for the territory was delayed for more than a decade. The signing of a tripartite and bilateral agreement by the United Nations in New York on 22 December 1988, was an important milestone in the constitutional and historical development although considerable obstacles impeded the course of independence for SWA.

After these agreements were signed, the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Pik Botha, remarked that the heavy losses inflicted by the South African forces on the enemy (the forces of the MPLA government and the Cuban troops) at the Lomba River in Angola (1987) was the turning point which resulted in the tripartite agreement.

Mr Botha's statement was a confirmation of previous statements by political leaders and military experts. The Minister of Defence, General Magnus Malan unequivocally indicated on several occasions that the military successes of the South African forces in Angola, forced the Cuban government and the MPLA authorities to the conference table. At a wings parade at the Central Flying School (Dunnottar) on 1 December 1988 he remarked as follows:

The battles at Lomba River and Cuito Cuanavale forced the Cubans and the Luanda regime to the conference table.

Historically, the constitutional development of SWA proved that diplomacy and negotiation played an important part. At the same time the decisive role of the military factors as an impetus to the negotiation process concerning SWA cannot be ignored. Similarly the historical part played by the military should not be underestimated vis-a-vis the political development of SWA.

In this article the military history of SWA is reviewed. In the nature of things, it is incomplete, albeit an attempt has been made to reflect and to place in perspective the most important facets which played a role in the historical development.

#### **First World War**

During the First World War, South Africa became involved in SWA for the first time when an expeditionary force of 67,000 men was mobilised in 1914 to conquer the territory from the German colonial regime. During the campaign in German South West Africa, the South African forces, with a loss of only 266 men, forced the German forces to surrender within six months. On 9 July 1915 Dr Theodor Seitz, the German Governor, and the Commander-in-Chief, Colonel V. Franke, surrendered at

Khorab (Otavi) with 4,740 soldiers. The territory of 825,000 square kilometres was placed temporarily under South African military rule on the same date.

Military rule in SWA was terminated on 17 December 1920 when the League of Nations placed it under the control of South Africa under the Mandate System.

### **The Twenties: Voluntary Organisations and Revolts**

In the early twenties the Administrator of SWA received several requests that rifle clubs be established. These requests were approved and regulations for the establishment of military rifle clubs were enacted in 1921. These rifle clubs had their own constitutions which were approved by the Administrator.

The next operational action by the Union Defence Force in SWA took place in 1922 when the Bondelswarts Tribe under the leadership of Captain Jacobus Christian revolted because the authorities would not agree to their claim that certain changes should be made to the borders of their reserve. After a refusal by the tribal chief to hand over a number of his followers who had misconducted themselves and had been involved in thefts, a force of 400 men was established in SWA. Members of the rifle clubs served in this force on a voluntary basis.

The South African Air Force assisted to quell the uprising. The rebels, who suffered heavy losses in battles at Driehoek and Berg Kanmer, were eventually forced to surrender on 2 July 1922 by which time the Air Force had flown 105 hours without loss. More than 100 rebels were killed whilst only two members of the security forces were lost.

In January 1923 a Citizen Force Proclamation was issued which provided for the inclusion and use of suitable, able-bodied men for the defence of the territory. A start was made to compile a Citizen Force list and officers were appointed. This system of military service was subsequently amended by proclamations in 1924 and 1927.

In April 1925 the Rehoboth Bastards revolted. Altogether 464 members of the Citizen Force were called up in certain districts and a force under the command of Col M.J. de Jager was mobilised to suppress the revolt. Three aircraft of the South African Air Force were also sent to SWA. On 4 April the aircraft took off from Louisvale and flew via Keetmanshoop to the Rehoboth territory. An air offensive against the rebels commenced the following day and was completed successfully within a few hours. Thereafter an air offensive was undertaken in other areas.

The security forces were lauded for the effective measures taken in a special resolution adopted by the SWA Advisory Council after the insurrection.

It is interesting to note that at that stage the SWA defence expenditure was borne entirely by the SWA Administration. This applied also to the Citizen Force component which was mobilised during the Rehoboth rebellion.

Another important event which occurred in 1925, was the cancellation of

the regulations promulgated in 1921 which authorised the establishment of rifle clubs. These were replaced by rifle practices controlled under the Citizen Force Regulations.

A concerted effort was made in 1927 to establish the Citizen Force (SWA) as an effective defence organisation. An ambitious scheme was published and permanent headquarters for the Citizen Force were established. Col M.J. de Jager was appointed Chief Commandant and Maj C.A.B. van Coller (the Commissioner of Police in SWA) as Chief Staff Officer and Captain W.G.C. Steyn as Staff Adjutant. In October 1927 further appointments were made, viz: Maj Fourie as Director of Medical Services and Maj E. Richardson as Director of Supplies.

Due to financial problems, the Citizen Force never really functioned properly and military training was no more than target practice. The post of Staff Adjutant was abolished in 1931 whilst that of Chief Commandant was relegated to an honorary position. The Citizen Force organisation virtually disappeared and even the target practice continued unofficially.

### **The Thirties: Insurrection and Establishment of the SWA Command**

In July 1932 the authorities had problems with the chief of the Ukuambi tribe. Three aircraft of the South African Air Force and two armoured cars were despatched from Pretoria to Ovambo and the tribal chief was forced to surrender.

In 1938 and 1939 several attempts were made to resuscitate the Citizen Force and a school cadet corps was established in SWA. Discussions held in March 1939 resulted in a draft resolution for the establishment of an infantry battalion of 29 officers and 402 other ranks. This proposal eventually resulted in Union Government Proclamation No 234 of 1939 which brought SWA under the provisions of the Defence Act of 1912. As a result of this proclamation the SWA Command was established in November 1939. It consisted of a Citizen Force component of volunteers supplemented by a support company and signallers.

On 1 December 1939 the 1 SWA Infantry Battalion (1 SWA Inf Bn) was established with its Headquarters in Windhoek. It became part of the Union Citizen Force.

### **The Second World War**

At this stage South Africa had already entered the Second World War as an ally of the Allied countries. SWA was no longer a German colony but German sentiments were still strong and Adolf Hitler's assumption of power in Germany had also strengthened the influence of the Nazi Party in SWA. In the thirties Hitler openly pressed for the return of the former German colonies. During Dr D.G. Conradie's term of office, militant Nazi organisations caused considerable unrest in SWA. The authorities were obliged to act and towards the end of 1939, 150 Nazi leaders had already been interned and in October 1940, 1,200 German speaking persons found themselves in internment camps.

The newly established infantry battalion in SWA was mobilised in 1940. In the months following this unit was mainly used to escort and guard prisoners of war.

As a result of the stable conditions in SWA during the Second World War, it was possible to transfer 1 SWA Inf Bn to the Union. On 22 June 1940 it was mobilised as a wartime battalion of volunteers and during the war it served in SA and in North Africa.

In 1940, 32 Defence rifle clubs were established in SWA and organised in four commandos, but became defunct in the same year. They were replaced by seventeen National Reserve Volunteer Units.

On 20 January 1940 the Adjutant General supplied the following information concerning the SWA Command to the Chief of the General Staff:

The SWA Headquarters had been established in Windhoek with the following staff:

Officer Commanding  
Two Staff Officers  
Two Orderly Clerks

One staff officer will also act as adjutant for 1 SWA In Bn which was established as a unit of the Active Citizen Force with headquarters in Windhoek and sub-units at Keetmanshoop, Grootfontein, Otjiwarongo, Outo, Okahandja and Kalkveld. Anti-aircraft and artillery units were placed at Walvis Bay.

#### **The Post War Period: 1946-1948**

On 1 January 1946 the old 1 SWA Inf Bn reverted to its previous name. The seventeen National Reserve Volunteer Units resumed their activities in 1946 and continued until 15 December 1948 when the rifle clubs were replaced by rifle commandos.

The National Reserve of Volunteer Units SWA were disbanded on 31 March 1947. Whilst serving, the National Volunteers received part-time military training to equip them for any task they may have been required to undertake.

#### **The Fifties: Establishment of Commandos**

During 1957 the SWA Infantry Unit was changed to an armoured car regiment as a result of a minor reorganisation of the Union Defence Force. The Governor General approved the new unit name namely, Regiment SWA. In the same year the rifle commandos were converted to commandos. The following six commandos and one field-cornetcy were established:

Commando Etosha Field-cornetcy Gibeon Gobabis Northern SWA North Western SWA Central SWA Southern SWA District(s) Tsumeb and Grootfontein Gibeon and Maltehohe Gobabis Outjo and Otjiwarongo Okahandja and Rehoboth Okahandja, Rehoboth and Windhoek Luderitz, Warmbad, Keetmanshoop and Betanie.

#### **The Sixties: Start of the "Border War"**

From 1 June 1960, Regiment SWA was renamed Regiment Windhoek in keeping with the policy to name units after the names of towns and places.

In 1965 the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), which

originated in 1958 as the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC), decided to launch terrorist attacks in SWA. SWAPO terrorists of the organisation's militant wing PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia) penetrated Ovambo and established a base at Ongulumbashe. On 26 August 1966 the police force destroyed the camp in a surprise attack. Two terrorists were shot and nine taken prisoner.

In the same year three other terrorist groups crossed the border to SWA and were active in Ovambo. On one occasion in September 1966, the border town Oshikango was attacked. In March 1967 a police patrol in West Caprivi was ambushed but practically all the terrorists were later shot or arrested. In May 1967 SWAPO suffered yet another setback when their Commander-in-Chief, Tobias Hanyeko, was shot dead in a skirmish next to the Zambezi River. In the ten months following, further successes were achieved against the terrorists and in April 1968 the security measures had been so successful that the police could withdraw their counter-insurgency personnel from Ovambo. In the same year 20 SWAPO leaders including Herman Toivo ja Toivo, received a life sentence for having contravened the Terrorism Act.

In October 1968 two large terrorist groups renewed their activities in Ovambo. Altogether 56 terrorists were arrested within a week of their arrival in Ovambo and PLAN thereafter operated in smaller groups.

### **State of Emergency - 1972**

A widespread strike in SWA in January 1972 resulted in the introduction of a state of emergency in the northern parts of SWA. At this time units of the South African Defence Force (SADF) were despatched to assist in maintaining law and order.

### Renewed Terrorism and SADF's Involvement (1973-1974)

In January 1973, SWAPO embarked upon a new offensive in terrorist attacks. In one instance a police camp was subjected to concentrated automatic rifle fire. The increase in terrorist activities led to the South African Army taking over the counter-insurgency task in 1973.

The increased terrorist activities of SWAPO during the period 1973-1974 and the greater involvement of the SADF in the area brought to light other problems. For the territory destined to become independent one day, the socio-economic conditions had certain specific weaknesses. The economy was based largely on agriculture which in itself was comparatively poorly developed. The general standard of education and training was inadequate while existing community services were not much better. It was against this background that the local authorities and State Department approached the SADF for assistance.

The aid programmes which the SADF introduced in response to the approaches were mainly in the educational, agricultural and technical fields. As early as October 1974 the first group of fifteen selected national servicemen, with teaching qualifications were transferred to Kavango to relieve the critical shortage of teaching staff and in the following year more than 150 teachers were sent to Ovambo, Kavango and Caprivi.

Requests received by the SADF for assistance in the field of

agriculture, resulted in the utilisation of agricultural extension officers, veterinary surgeons and agricultural technicians. SADF personnel were also used as teachers at agricultural institutions such as Onqongo Agricultural College (Ovambo). Agricultural extension officers were also involved in cultivation projects such as the vegetable project at Kapako (Kavango).

The SADF also assisted local authorities and communities in the field of medicine. Medical doctors at bases were, after completion of their daily rounds at sick parades, available for service in state hospitals where the local population could be treated. Medical officers also ran clinics in the different districts where thousands received medical treatment. The SADF also made available dentists, veterinary surgeons, pharmacists, health officers, nursing staff and medical orderlies who made an indispensable contribution to the improvement of the health of humans and animals in the operational area. Thanks to the prompt actions of medical personnel, many lives were saved; for example many persons who were injured in landmine explosions, were taken by helicopters and aircraft to hospitals where emergency operations could be carried out in time.

The SADF's contribution to the socio-economic development in SWA over many years, never featured prominently in the media. The SADF's operational achievements enjoyed more publicity. However, a former editor of Die Transvaler, Dr Willem (Wimpie) de Klerk, paid tribute to the role of the SADF in SWA on 21 July 1982 after a conducted tour of SWA. He wrote inter alia as follows:

Indeed the Defence Force is employer, tutor, philanthropist and entrepreneur in a world imprisoned in primitiveness and under-development. They did all the humanitarian things to win the mind and heart of the indigenous population to share in the liberating life-style of quality.

In a publication entitled The South African Defence Force's Contribution to the Socio-Economic Development of South West Africa (1982, issued by the Military Information Bureau), the author, J.A. Visser, summed up his observations as follows:

Against the background of the positive and constructive contribution of the SADF, it is clear that the SADF was the greatest single obstacle impeding a Marxist take-over in SWA. By the presence of the SADF the social and economic progress as well as the political rights and freedom of the indigenous population groups were guaranteed, assured and respected.

### **Operation Savannah (1975 -1976)**

In 1974 the end of the Portuguese rule in Angola was already in sight. The unstable situation in Angola and the threat that the Angolan Civil War posed for SWA, led to the deployment of a South African protective force of only 2,000 men on the northern border. This force which supported the FNLA and UNITA forces, came up against a numerically superior Cuban and MPLA force but in spite of this, scored brilliant victories. In a Blitzkrieg, Task Force Zulu recaptured the south-western corner of Angola after Perreira de Eca, Rocades and several

other towns were captured.

In Central Angola Combat Group Foxbat defeated the enemy at Liumbala in October 1975. Thereafter Task Force Zulu were victorious at Cacula and Catengue. The victories at Catengue in November 1975 forced the enemy to abandon the Benguela front.

Task Force Zulu and Combat Group Foxbat halted the enemy in the Santa Comba area on the Cela front and were victorious at the battle of Ebo. In Eastern Angola Combat Group X-Ray (later renamed Combat Group Orange) were also victorious at Xangongo and Luso.

The victories of Task Force Zulu and Combat Group Foxbat at the battle of Bridge 14 on the central front are well known. The battle took place after the South African Forces had advanced to Quibala. However, they had to cross the Nhia River at Bridge 14 (which had been destroyed by enemy forces) and here a group of engineers repaired the bridge while a fierce battle was raging.

Thereafter the bridge could be crossed and the advance on Cassamba and Almeida continued. After the capture of these towns the South African forces were ordered not to proceed with the attack on Quibala.

In January the South African forces were ordered to withdraw and on 25 January 1976 the withdrawal was practically completed. Citizen Force units which were deployed as four combat groups in South Angola to protect the Calueque/Ruacana Water Scheme and the refugee camps, however, left Angola only on 27 March 1976.

After the withdrawal of the South African forces from Angola in 1976, PLAN was able to establish a wide network of training and base camps in the south of Angola from where they could infiltrate SWA. In 1978 this led to the first of a number of pre-emptive operations by the SADF in Angola.

### **Operation Reindeer (1978)**

Increasing terrorism by SWAPO as a result of easy entry into Ovambo via Angola's unprotected southerly border, compelled South Africa to embark upon pre-emptive action.

This decision resulted in a series of semi-conventional actions primarily against SWAPO bases and facilities in South Angola. The first action of its kind -Reindeer- was launched on 4 May 1978 and comprised of an air and paratroop attack on SWAPO's most important training and logistic support base at Cassinga (known as "Moscow") as well as a ground attack by a mechanised unit aimed at the forward transit camps on the border area including a large complex (known as "Vietnam") near Chetequera, 28 km north of the border.

Approximately 1000 terrorists died and 200 were captured with a loss of only six members of the security forces. A large quantity of equipment and supplies were destroyed and valuable documents seized. The loss of trained personnel and the effect of the information obtained by the security forces was a serious setback for SWAPO from which they never really recovered.

### **The Acceptance of Resolution 435 (1978)**

In April 1978 South Africa accepted an amended version of the Western Contact Group's proposals for SWA. It provided for a general election under UN supervision for the establishment of a constituting body as preparation for independence by the end of that year. It was, however, subject to a condition that units of the SADF would remain in SWA until SWAPO abandoned its subversive activities.

On 29 September 1978 the Western Contact Group's constitutional plan was accepted as Resolution 435 of the Security Council (UN). It provided for the cessation of hostilities, a reduction of the South African forces to 1,500 over a period of three months and the holding of free elections under the supervision of a military and civil assistance group of the UN known as the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG).

### **Operations in East Caprivi (1978)**

In June 1978 it was learnt that SWAPO was preparing to attack the military bases at Katima Mulilo, Wenela and Mapacha. To meet this attack two combat teams viz. Alpha and Bravo were formed.

The attack started on 23 August with a stand-off bombardment using 122 mm rockets on Katima Mulilo. One of these penetrated the roof of a barrack killing ten soldiers.

After an artillery and mortar battle the two combat units crossed the border. Combat team Bravo's target was a SWAPO base camp approximately 30 km from the Zambian border but they found it deserted and returned to Mapacha without having accomplished this objective. Combat Unit Alpha managed to catch up with the rear guard of a number of fleeing terrorists but were enticed into an ambush. In the fighting which ensued five terrorists were killed while about sixty fled. In a later skirmish at a terrorist base seven more terrorists were killed.

On 25 August combat teams Alpha, Bravo and Charlie Papa (consisting of a paratroop support company, a company of 31 Battalion and 140 mm gun troop) again crossed the border to Zambia en route to Imusho, Cinzenbela and elsewhere but found them abandoned. The only worthwhile incident took place at Cinzenbela when a local garrison fired at a South African helicopter, with an anti-aircraft gun. This was silenced by Combat Unit Bravo's artillery. The combat units crossed the border and returned on 27 August.

### **Operations Safraan and Rekstok (1979)**

The next two big operations - Safraan and Rekstok - were launched early in March 1979. Both operations were necessary because of the presence of large numbers of SWAPO terrorists in Zambia preparing to attack targets in SWA.

During Operation Safraan, which took place in four phases, several SWAPO bases in the neighbourhood of Sinjembele and Njinje forest (Zambia) were attacked and destroyed.

SWAPO wisely decided not to retaliate but to abandon its bases in Zambia before they were attacked. During Operation Rekstok terrorist



bases at Muongo, Oncua, Henhombe, Heque and elsewhere in Angola were attacked.

### **Establishment of SWA Military School (1979)**

Towards the end of 1979 the SWA Military School was established. A start had already been made with the training of junior leaders which included officers and non-commissioned officers.

### **Proposals for a Demilitarised Zone (1980)**

Early in 1980 there appeared to be some hope that Resolution 435 would be implemented as a result of a proposal for a demilitarised zone along the Angola/SWA border during the interim period preceding the election under UN supervision. Although details of the Demilitarised Zone were finalised in March 1980, South Africa insisted that SWAPO should be prevented from having bases in the northern part of SWA. South Africa also insisted that all SWAPO terrorists should withdraw to Angola or Zambia north of the Demilitarised Zone. South Africa also expressed doubts as to the ability of the UN force to maintain the peace. This resulted in a deadlock and Resolution 435 was not implemented.

### **Operations Sceptic and Klipkop (1980)**

The next operation - Sceptic - was launched in June 1980 as a lightning attack on a SWAPO base in South Angola but developed into an extended operation as more and more SWAPO caches were discovered in the territory. Operation Sceptic also saw the first serious clashes between the SADF and the Angolan forces (FAPLA).

During the operation the South African forces clashed for the first time with mechanised elements of SWAPO. SWAPO lost its forward base facilities and 380 terrorists were killed. Several hundred tons of equipment and supplies as well as many vehicles were captured by the security forces. Seventeen members of the SA force were killed.

Operation Klipkop (June 1980) was a much smaller operation aimed at disrupting SWAPO's logistic and support facilities.

### **Establishment of the SWA Territory Force (1980)**

The first major step in the establishment of an independent territorial defence force in SWA was the introduction of a new uniform on 6 September 1979 through which SWA units could be distinguished from SADF units. A start was also made with the regrouping of existing units into four formations: a Formation Headquarters Staff, A Reaction Force (conventional), an Area Force (unconventional) and an Air Force. As regards the latter the South African Air Force would remain responsible for aerial operations, although provision was made for an air commando squadron consisting of private and commercially qualified air crews. Their main function was to assist the South African Air Force in reconnaissance and communication flights and to provide operational officers for the operational service.

A highlight was the establishment on 1 August 1980 of a Department of Defence in SWA under the control of the Administrator General (SWA). From that date all the local units would collectively be known as the South West African Territory Force (SWATF). The overhead planning, liaison and co-ordination between the SADF and the SWATF would be

controlled by a joint committee with the sole object to develop an independent headquarters organisation for the SWATF.

The SWATF would in the first instance be responsible for the finances, logistics and administration of the Territory Force whilst the SADF would still be responsible for the military operations. The SWATF consisted of a full-time and a part-time element. The full-time element consisted of Permanent Force personnel, voluntary members of auxiliary services and national servicemen.

The part-time members served in the Area Force (Area Protection Units) and in the Reaction Force (Citizen Force). The SWATF eventually consisted of a Headquarters, eight full-time battalions, 27 Area Force units, a Reaction Force brigade, a logistical brigade and a large number of special and training units.

Approximately 65 per cent of the combat units in the operational area were members of the SWATF.

### **Operations Carnation and Protea (1981)**

The encounters with FAPLA in Operation Sceptic were the prelude to further conflicts during Operations Carnation and Protea in July and August 1981. As a result of the setbacks in 1980 SWAPO moved its bases further north in proximity to and even among the forces of FAPLA to discourage attacks by the South African forces. SWAPO's logistic system virtually became part of that of FAPLA.

In the middle of 1981 the military situation on the northern border of SWA had become serious. The stockpiling of large quantities of ammunition and the increase in FAPLA and SWAPO forces in South Angola had become a real conventional threat to SWA. In July 1981 several skirmishes took place between the security forces and PLAN. The General Officer Commanding of the SWA Territory Force announced on 6 July that 52 terrorists had been shot in contacts with the security forces in a period of four days. This sharp increase in skirmishes with SWAPO terrorists resulted in the launching of Operation Carnation.

Although 225 terrorists were shot during this operation, it did not prove to be a complete success. The security forces did not operate further than 25 km north of the border while the larger terrorist bases were situated further north.

At this time FAPLA also adopted a more provocative attitude towards the security forces. Its air defence system became a real threat to the South African air support operations during Operation Protea.

During Operation Protea several SWAPO bases and command posts in the vicinity of Xangongo and Ongiva were attacked and destroyed by three task forces. The operation began on 23 August 1981 with an air attack on a FAPLA radar station and key installations of the Angola air defence system.

On 24 August the ground troops advanced along three separate routes to Xangongo. A mechanised force attacked the bases in the town where the headquarters of SWAPO's north western front had been established. At

the same time other elements destroyed SWAPO bases south and southwest of the town. Xangongo was isolated and cut off from any possible intervention by FAPLA forces from Humbe and Peu Peu in the north west and north east respectively. The combined force of SWAPO/ FAPLA defenders were soon driven out by an attack on the tanks and infantry which were dug in and around the town.

After FAPLA and SWAPO had been driven from Xangongo, the main task force proceeded to the east and south driving the FAPLA force from Mongua. The attack on Ongiva took place on 26 August 1981 and the town was occupied on 28 August after a combined force of SWAPO/ FAPLA, which was dug in, was defeated. Several Soviet officers were killed in this battle and a Russian warrant officer was captured. Thereafter, SWAPO facilities in and around Ongiva were destroyed and the operation was concluded on 10 September 1981.

Operation Protea was the biggest mechanised operation undertaken by the SA Army since the Second World War. During this operation the security forces lost ten men against the more than 1,000 casualties of SWAPO and FAPLA. The approximately four thousand tons of equipment captured included several tanks and armoured cars, a large quantity of anti-aircraft guns and about 200 logistic vehicles.

#### **Operation Daisy (1981)**

Operation Protea resulted from information obtained during the earlier operations and in turn led to the next major operation - Daisy - which was launched on 1 November 1981. A mechanised force penetrated to the furthest point ever since the Angolan Civil War. Targets were attacked at Bambi and Cheraquera. Although contact was not made with FAPLA ground forces, a few MiG-21 fighter aircraft challenged the SA Air Force and one was shot down by a Mirage. Operation Daisy was concluded on 20 November 1981.

#### **Operation Super (1982)**

Early in 1982 it became clear that SWAPO was preparing to open a new front in Kaokoland. Reconnaissance elements of 32 Battalion were sent to track SWAPO terrorists who were planning to infiltrate into the area. Approximately 250 terrorists were found at an assembly point near the little town Iona in Southwestern Angola from where they intended to infiltrate into SWA. Seventy five soldiers were flown to the area to carry out a surprise attack. Thirty soldiers were deployed as stopper groups while the main force of 45 launched the attack. Although the terrorists greatly outnumbered the soldiers, they were surprised and overwhelmed; altogether 201 terrorists were killed while only two men of 32 Battalion sustained slight wounds. A large quantity of weapons and ammunition was taken.

#### **Operation Meebos (1982)**

Operation Meebos was launched in July and August 1982 and consisted of a number of air attacks on SWAPO's command and control system. A total of 345 terrorists were killed and SWAPO's so-called "east front" headquarters at Mupa destroyed before it could be moved. The security forces lost 29 soldiers, of whom 15 were killed in an incident when a Puma helicopter was shot down.

In February 1983 a South African and an Angolan delegation held discussions at Cape Verde on a proposed cease fire, but without success.

### **Operation Phoenix (1983)**

In the middle of February 1983 SWAPO launched a new offensive in an effort to restore lost prestige. A special force of about 1,700 terrorists operating in different companies started infiltrating Ovambo on 13 February and in the first major contact on 15 February fifteen terrorists were killed. The security forces' counteraction (Operation Phoenix) was highly successful and at the termination of the operation on 13 April 1983, 309 terrorists had been killed. The security forces lost 27 men.

### **New General Officer Commanding**

Major General G.L. Meiring succeeded Maj Gen Charles Lloyd as SWATF's General Officer Commanding on 9 November 1983.

### **Operation Askari (1983)**

At the end of 1983 it became clear that SWAPO was planning a full scale infiltration for early in 1984. Operation Askari, which started on 6 December 1983, was aimed at disrupting PLAN's logistical infrastructure and the command and control systems by means of several air and ground attacks. Although the attacks were concentrated on PLAN, the FAPLA forces became involved in the battles and several confrontations occurred with the Angolans.

Four mechanised combat groups of 500 men each had specific targets to attack while the smaller infantry groups carried out area operations in the border areas.

The biggest encounter between the SA forces and FAPLA occurred on 3 January, 1984 when FAPLA's 11 Brigade and two Cuban battalions rushed to assist SWAPO when its headquarters and a base, situated five kilometres from Cuvelai, were attacked. This force was driven off leaving 324 dead; the highest number of losses of the security forces in Operation Askari - 21 men - was suffered in this battle.

Operation Askari ended on 13 January 1984. Withdrawal of the SA forces was delayed by heavy rains and floods. The most important result of Operation Askari was that Angola was forced to discuss a possible cessation of hostilities in Southern Angola with South Africa in Lusaka.

Discussions took place in Lusaka, and in February 1984, the Lusaka Agreement was signed in terms of which a Joint Monitor Commission would monitor the withdrawal of the South African troops from Angola. Angola undertook to ensure that no SWAPO terrorists or Cuban forces would enter the areas from which the South African forces had withdrawn. The withdrawal of the SA forces was a slow process and was only completed in April 1985.

Although several meetings took place in 1985 and 1986, little progress was made in the search for a peaceful solution in SWA/Namibia and Angola. On 17 June 1985 a Transitional Government for National Unity

was formed in Windhoek. This interim government was, however, not acceptable to the Western contact group.

### **Operation Boswilger (1985)**

After the security forces' withdrawal from Angola on 1 April 1985, SWAPO terrorists took advantage of the situation and began to operate again across the border from bases in Angola. The security forces were obliged to take appropriate action.

During Operation Boswilger, which began on 29 June 1985 and lasted only 48 hours, tracks of SWAPO terrorists were followed to their bases in three different parts of Angola. On the first day 43 terrorists were killed and one arrested in 23 contacts. On the second day fourteen terrorists were killed and four arrested in thirteen contacts. Thereafter the security forces withdrew.

### **The SWATF in 1987-1987**

In 1986 - 20 years after the start of the SWAPO terrorists activities - 476 terrorist incidents were recorded compared with 656 the previous year. A total of 645 terrorists were killed in skirmishes with security forces. The total losses sustained by SWAPO since their first confrontation with the security forces, were 10,283.

SWATF's 61 Mechanised Battalion had two successful military manoeuvres in 1986 and proved why it was feared by the enemy.

The chaplain services in the operational area were extended further in 1986 when for the first time two chaplains were appointed in Permanent Force posts at Omega and Buffalo.

The command of the SWATF and the SA Army Forces in SWA was handed over by Major General Georg Meiring to Major General Willie Meyer on 23 January 1987.

Maj Gen Meyer served previously in SWA as the Second-in-Command before he was appointed as Officer Commanding of OVS Command in January 1983.

The 1987 intake of recruits caused considerable reaction. More recruits than had been planned for reported. According to the Head of Staff Personnel of the SWATF, Brig C.C. van der Westhuizen, the 1987 intake was the best in quantity and quality.

In January 1987 SWAPO terrorists were active in white farming areas for the first time since 1983, but their activities were effectively neutralised by the security forces' counter insurgency-operations. The success was partly due to the assistance of the local population which kept the security forces informed of the movement of the terrorists in their areas. In 1987 in more than 2,000 instances information on enemy movement, caches and ammunition was given to the security forces.

### **Operations Moduler and Hooper (1987- 1988)**

The South African forces assisted the UNITA resistance movement militarily during Operation Moduler (1 July-15 December 1987) to halt the advance of the FAPLA forces on Mavinga and Jamba south of the Lomba River.

FAPLA's southerly offensive from Cuito Cuanavale was launched on 14 August 1987 with six brigades. Intelligence suggested that FAPLA had deployed a large number of armoured vehicles around Cuito Cuanavale. A South African team was seconded to UNITA to assist the resistance movement in the preparation of its anti-tank strategy; if necessary, the South African forces would also provide air and artillery support.

The FAPLA forces made good progress despite the fact that UNITA disrupted their logistical support in their rear areas. The deployment of the South African mechanised forces prevented FAPLA from crossing the Lomba River and in their attempt to establish a bridge head, their brigades suffered heavy losses. In the battles on 13 and 14 September UNITA suffered 40 losses, and the South African supporting force lost six soldiers as against 382 losses of the FAPLA forces.

The most momentous encounter took place on 3 October when FAPLA suffered a crushing defeat. The remains of the FAPLA forces then joined the remaining brigades north of the river. Thereafter FAPLA withdrew to Cuito Cuanavale.

At this time FAPLA was still in a position to launch a new offensive. UNITA and the South African supporting force could, therefore, not withdraw and orders were given that all FAPLA brigades east of the Cuito River had to be destroyed or driven back. The Cuito River then had to be turned into an obstacle for FAPLA. A shortage of supplies and limited air support for the FAPLA forces compelled them to withdraw to Nancova. Between 9 and 16 November the South African forces were involved in a further large scale encounter in the vicinity of Chambinga and Humbe Rivers. In these battles sixteen South African soldiers were killed while FAPLA lost 525 men and a large quantity of weapons. Operation Moduler ended towards the middle of December 1987 and was followed by Operation Hooper.

Additional FAPLA forces were moved to Cuito Cuanavale after the completion of Operation Moduler and according to UNITA, FAPLA then had more than 25,000 men at its disposal. The South African force successfully used G5 guns to drive off this concentration of FAPLA forces in a westerly and northerly direction. Since FAPLA still posed a threat, the South Africans continued to support UNITA in its effort to drive off the FAPLA forces in the area between the Cautir and Chambinga Rivers.

FAPLA's 21 Brigade which was deployed along the Cautir River, was driven from this area on 13 January 1988. There were no losses on the South African side but FAPLA lost a further 250 men and a large quantity of ammunition. On 14 February FAPLA's 59 Brigade was attacked and after an unsuccessful counter-attack by FAPLA, the enemy lost, inter alia, 230 men and nine tanks, and were forced to withdraw.

UNITA, supported by the South African supporting force, attacked the positions of FAPLA's 21, 25 and 59 Brigades at the Tumpo River and Dala on 25 February. These attacks, during which FAPLA suffered considerable losses, resulted in them being pinned down in a pre-selected area at Cuito Cuanavale. Thereafter the South African forces continued with the tactical withdrawal which started in December 1987.

The intervention by the South African forces in Angola prevented a large scale FAPLA victory over UNITA and prevented SWAPO from gaining access to the north eastern sector of SWA. The losses suffered by the South African task force were negligible: 31 South African soldiers and twelve members of the SWA Territory Force. FAPLA in contrast lost more than 7,000 men and a large quantity of weapons and ammunition.

### **Operations Packer and Displace (1988)**

During Operation Packer, which succeeded Operation Hooper in March 1988, 82 Mechanised Brigade (which consists predominantly of members of the Citizen Force) continued to protect the eastern bank of the Cuito River. During this operation the FAPLA forces again suffered heavy losses and the situation on the eastern bank stabilised to such an extent that Operation Displace could be started. During this phase the South African forces withdrew from Angola.

### **The Conflict at Calueque (1988)**

A combined FAPLA-Cuban force first launched a ground attack and thereafter a treacherous air attack with MiG fighter aircraft on the Calueque Water Scheme on 27 June 1988. The ground attack was halted by a protection force of the SADF and SWATF. Twelve SA soldiers and more than 300 Cuban and Angolan soldiers died in the two skirmishes.

South Africa also raised the knotty question regarding the cost of implementing Resolution 435. It was estimated that it would cost approximately R1,5 billion to implement the Resolution for SWA's independence under the supervision of the UN and a UN peace-keeping force.

During the discussions at Ruacana on 16 August 1988 it was agreed that a Joint Military Monitoring Commission (JMMC), consisting of representatives of FAPLA and Cuban forces and officers of the SA Defence Force, be formed. This JMMC would monitor the withdrawal of the SA forces from Angola.

On the same date the SWATF in Windhoek announced that fourteen SWAPO terrorists had been killed in skirmishes with the security forces the previous week.

At Ruacana on 22 August military representatives of SA, the SWATF and a combined Cuban/Angolan delegation signed a formal agreement which provided for the cessation of hostilities between the two parties. The agreement also provided for the establishment of the proposed Joint Military Monitoring Commission (JMMC). In a statement issued after the signing of the agreement it was announced that the JMMC would meet daily with effect from 30 August.

The next round of discussions began in Congo Brazzaville on 24 August. On the same day, the State President, Mr P.W. Botha, warned during a joint session of Parliament, with reference to the situation in South Western Africa, that "experience has taught us not to expect too much too soon."

At the talks in Brazzaville the timetable for the Cuban withdrawal was

discussed. No decision was made and the parties agreed to continue their discussions in Brazzaville at a later date.

These discussions in no way deterred SWAPO from continuing with its terrorist campaign. On the evening of 1 September two people were killed and at least fifteen injured when two powerful explosive devices rocked the central part of Windhoek.

The discussions were resumed in Brazzaville on 6 September. At this meeting it was noted that the South African forces had, in terms of the Geneva Protocol, withdrawn from Angola before 1 September and that the Joint Military Monitoring Commission was functioning satisfactorily. The respective delegations re-affirmed their commitment to Resolution 435. Concerning the withdrawal of the Cubans, Cuba offered to withdraw its forces from Angola over a period of three years.

During the joint session at Brazzaville the South African delegation raised the issue of the alleged shipment of additional Cuban troops and ordnance. The Cuban delegation strongly denied these allegations which were, inter alia, made in Washington by officials of the American Government. They stated that they were continuing with normal supplying of their soldiers as well as the replacing of troops who had completed their term of duty in Angola.

The discussions ended without adopting any important decision and the respective delegations return home to report to their governments.

The discussions were only resumed in Brazzaville on 26 September. At the first combined session on 27 September the Cuban delegation accused South Africa of using delaying tactics. The biggest stumbling block, however, was the withdrawal of the Cuban forces from Angola. Although a combined statement to the contrary was issued after the discussions, it became clear that 1 November 1988, the proposed date of implementation of Resolution 435, was no longer possible

More than a month elapsed before the parties met on 10 November at Geneva for the next round of talks. On this occasion the timetable for the Cuban withdrawal became a focal point of the negotiations and the respective parties made a concerted effort to reach agreement. Certain proposals concerning the Cuban withdrawal were tentatively agreed upon and were submitted to their governments. These were later accepted.

On 17 November the General Assembly of the UN again appealed to the RSA to relinquish SWA. It also rejected the withdrawal of Cubans from Angola as a prerequisite for the implementation of Resolution 435 and confirmed its support for SWAPO. By this action the decisions taken a few days before at Geneva were completely ignored.

The discussions were continued in Brazzaville on 1 December. At this meeting the Director-General of Foreign Affairs, Mr Neil van Heerden, and his team of negotiators negotiated with the Cuban and Angolan delegations for verification of the Cuban withdrawal.

The Minister of Defence, General Magnus Malan, again referred to the activities of the South African forces in Angola at a passing out



parade at Dunnottar on 1 December. He mentioned that the SADF gained an impressive victory over the forces of Cuba and the MPLA government of a magnitude which has not yet been achieved in the modern history of semi-conventional warfare. General Malan added that his victory forced Cuba and the MPLA regime to the conference table. "It is in a spirit of victory that our forces were withdrawn from Angola. There never was more than three thousand men and they had a prescribed and limited task."

The following day General Malan accompanied Mr Pik Botha to Brazzaville to sign a formal agreement with Cuba and the MPLA Government. On their arrival at Mayo-Mayo, the two ministers were briefed by the South African negotiating team on developments on the first day. Thereafter further discussions were held with the Deputy Secretary for African Affairs and Chairman of the Brazzaville meeting, Dr Chester Crocker. There was every indication that an important breakthrough had been made and that the Brazzaville Protocol would soon be signed. This, however, did not materialise at this round of talks.

The South African delegation returned to South Africa on 4 December. The obvious and sudden departure of the South Africans was severely criticised by the Cuban and Angolan delegates.

The South African delegation was back in Brazzaville on 13 December. This time no fundamental differences occurred and the Brazzaville Protocol was signed. The signing ceremony took place in the Palais de Peuple (the people's palace) in the presence of 200 representatives of many countries, the Congo and the international media.

In terms of the provisions of the Brazzaville Protocol it was recommended to the Secretary General of the UN that 1 April 1989 be the date of implementation of Resolution 435. The parties would also meet in New York on 22 December to sign the final tripartite agreement and the bilateral treaty between Cuba and the MPLA government.

The Brazzaville Protocol also provided for the setting up of a combined commission to act as a forum for discussion and solving matters concerning the interpretation and application of the subsequent tripartite agreement. It was further agreed that prisoners of war would be exchanged after the tripartite agreement was signed on 22 December.

After signing the Brazzaville Protocol, President Jose Eduardo dos Santos of Angola made a plea for international financial assistance to finance the withdrawal of the Cubans. He estimated the cost at R1840 million (800 million dollars).

In Lusaka SWAPO's secretary for information and publicity, Mr Hidipo Hamutenja, welcomed the signing of the Brazzaville Protocol on behalf of the organisation.

The signing of the Brazzaville Protocol was not the only newsworthy happening on that day in the history of South West Africa. On that day two Angolan MiG-21 fighter aircraft crossed the border and flew in a southerly direction. One of the aircraft later returned, but the second made a forced landing on a farm near Otjiwarongo. The pilot landed

safely and was taken prisoner. After this incident the Minister of Defence, General Malan, said that although the aircraft were observed on radar screen by the security forces, they were not shot down because the South African Air Force acted in keeping with the spirit of the Brazzaville Protocol.

The State Security Council of the RSA approved the provisions of the proposed tripartite agreement at an extraordinary meeting held in Cape Town on 20 December. That evening the South African delegation under the leadership of Mr. Pik Botha was already on its way to the UN in New York to sign the agreement.

The tripartite agreement was signed on 22 December 1988 by the three Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The function, which was intended to be a lustrous occasion, was marred when Mr Botha's Cuban counterpart, Mr. Isidiro Malmierca Peoli made a scathing attack on South Africa. This compelled Mr Botha to rebuke him and to challenge him to a public debate. Mr George Shultz, the American Secretary of State, who acted as chairman of the meeting, then intervened.

After the tripartite agreement was signed, Mr Schultz handed it to the Secretary General, Dr Javier Perez De Cuellar. Thus the most important agreement, which paved the way to peace in South Western Africa, was ratified. The way was also paved for the implementation of Resolution 435 and the negotiated settlement plan for SWA.

In terms of this agreement, the negotiated settlement plan would be implemented on 1 April 1989. The RSA's military personnel would, in terms of the provisions of Resolution 435, be withdrawn from South West Africa from this date. On 13 May 1989 there would be a maximum of 13,000 South African soldiers in SWA and on 24 June this figure would be no more than 1,500. This meant that only 1,500 would be in specific camps on polling day (1 November 1989). One week after certification by the UN of the result of the elections, all remaining South African troops would be withdrawn from SWA. The SWATF had to be demobilised six weeks after the implementation of Resolution 435 (on 13 May 1989).

The bilateral treaty between Cuba and the MPLA government concerning the Cuban withdrawal from Angola, was also signed on 22 December 1988. This provided for the withdrawal of approximately 50,000 Cuban soldiers from Angola over a period of 27 months. The withdrawal and regrouping of Cuban forces were to start after the signing of the two agreements on 22 December and by 1 April 1989 the withdrawal of 3,000 soldiers should have been finalised. The withdrawal would be monitored by a team of 90 men known as UNAVEM (United Nations Angola Verification Mission). UNAVEM consisted of a headquarters in Luanda and several observation teams, to be deployed on 1 April 1989.

According to the timetable for the Cuban withdrawal all Cuban troops should have withdrawn by 1 August 1989 to the north to the adjusted 15th parallel. On 1 November 1989 (the polling date in South West Africa) all Cuban soldiers should be withdrawn north of the adjusted 13th parallel. On the same date half of all Cuban forces in Angola should be withdrawn and on 1 April 1990 two thirds. By October 1990, 76 per cent of the troops should have left. By 1 January 1991 there should

not be more than 1,200 troops in Angola and, six months later, all Cuban troops should have left the country.

By the end of 1988 the security situation generally was more favourable than in the previous year. Confrontations and ambushes with terrorist gangs of SWAPO for example decreased from 206 in 1987 to 132 in 1988, whilst landmine incidents decreased from 97 in 1987 to 89 in 1988. Instances of intimidation by terrorist gangs decreased from 56 in 1987 to 32 in 1988.

On the other hand the number of sabotage incidents increased from 93 in 1987 to 111 in 1988. Stand-off bombardments by SWAPO terrorists likewise increased from 25 in 1987 to 41 in 1988.

The death of 72 civilians in 1988 can be ascribed to SWAPO and other military actions. This reflected a decrease compared with 126 civilians killed in 1987. In their sustained efforts to safeguard the people of SWA/Namibia the security forces shot 330 terrorists.

The price SWAPO had to pay for its failed revolutionary onslaught of 22 years was high: since the skirmish on 26 August 1966, to the end of 1988, 11,335 terrorists were killed in battles with the security forces.

For SWA 1988 was surely a historical year during which important landmarks were reached. On the eve of the new year it appeared that the end of the so-called "border war" in South West Africa was in sight.

The large scale infiltration of SWA by a large number of heavily armed SWAPO terrorists on 1 April 1989 and the bloody battles that ensued indicated that many stumbling blocks remained to be overcome in 1989 before the ideal of an independent Namibia could be achieved.