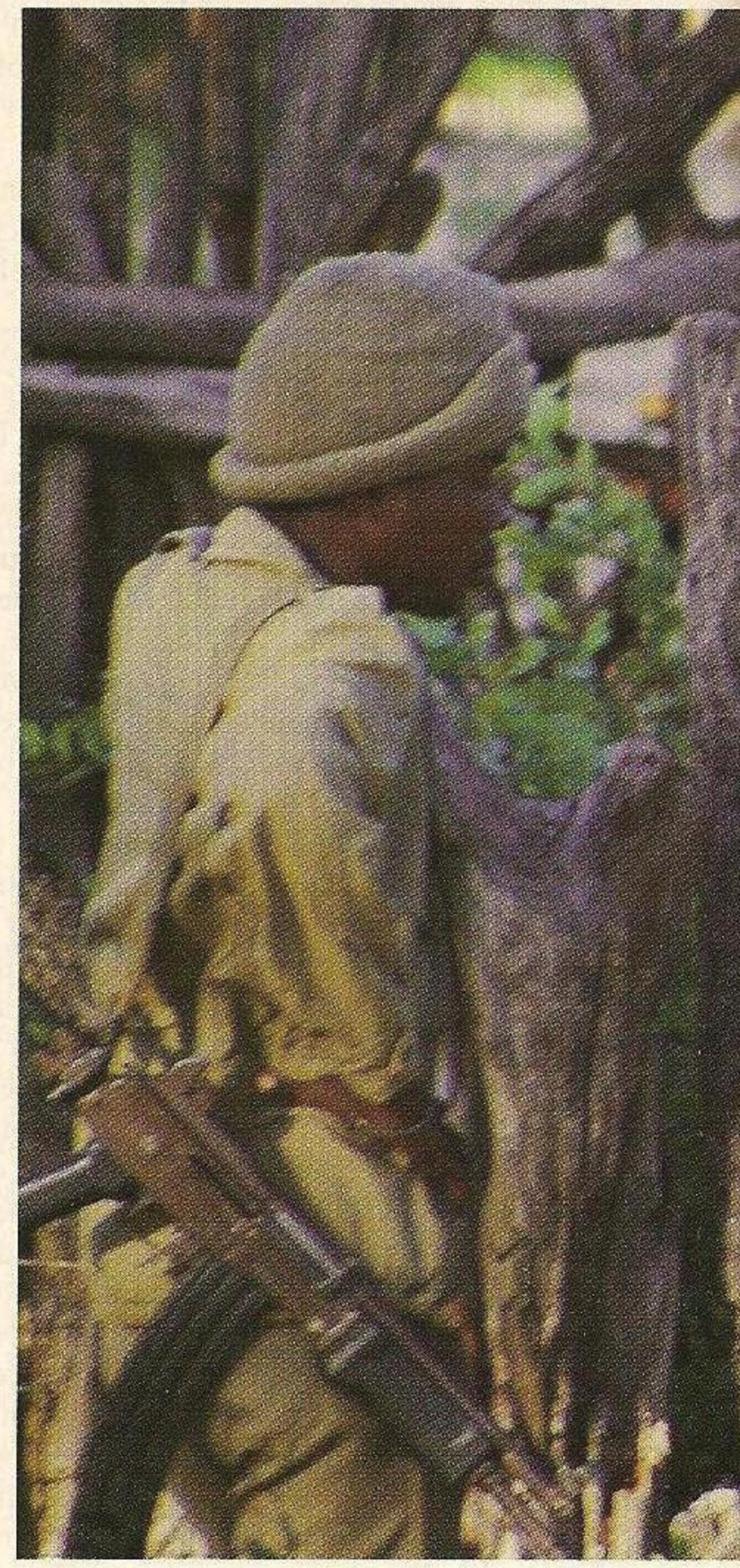
# INTO ANGOLA

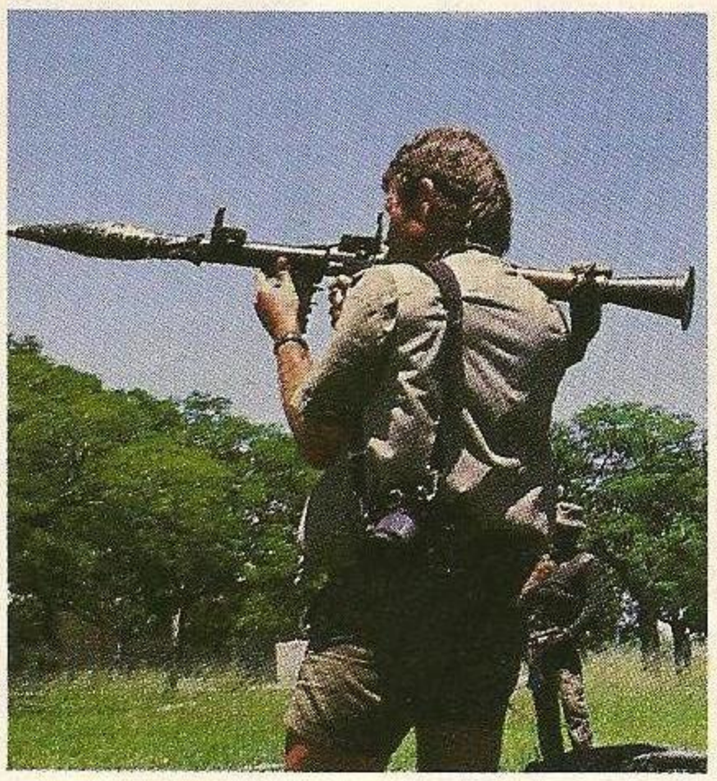
## SOF Staffer Tracks Terrs With Team Papa Zulu

**Text & Photos by John Coleman**



**LEFT: Senior Editor Coleman lines up RPG-7 in Angola.**

WE ran through the South West African bush under a boiling blue-white sky. I could feel the sun cooking my already burnt arms and the heat from the hard-baked ground simmering through my shoes. Up ahead I could see callsign Papa Zulu's Owambo trackers pursuing their unseen quarry with great, easy strides, their R5 rifles ready for action in case the prey suddenly became the hunter.

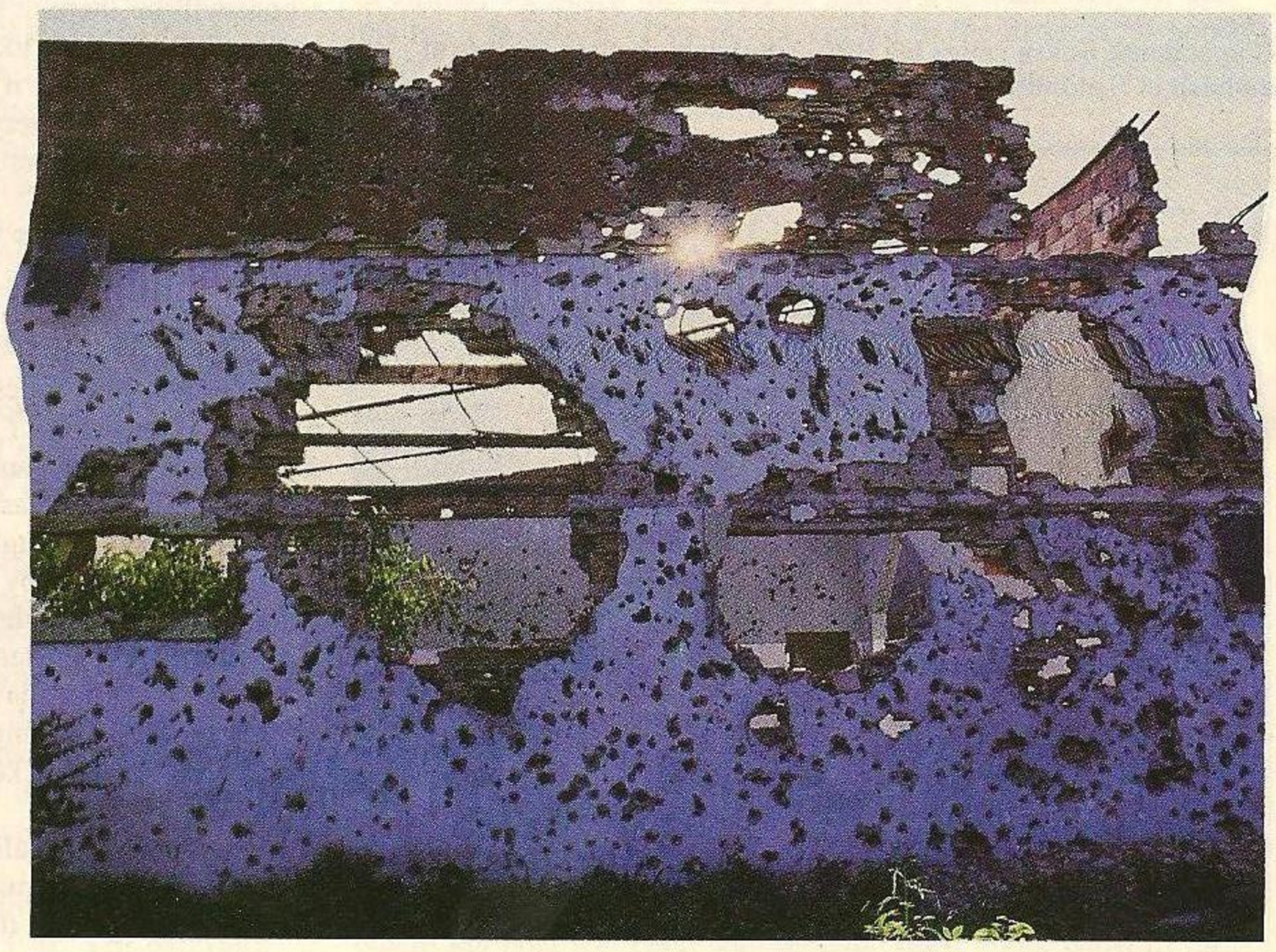


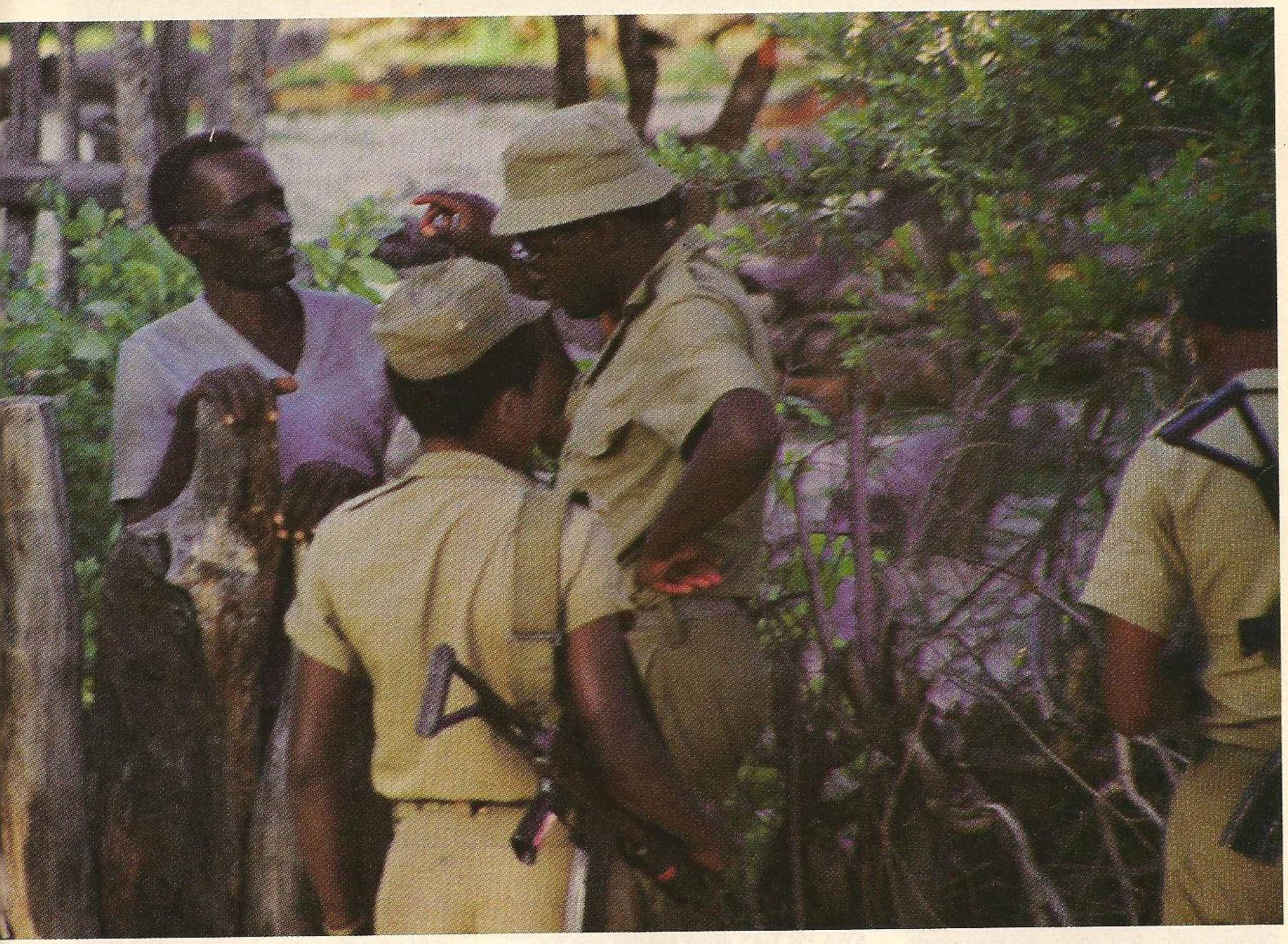
The *spoor* (track) was good, and when the Owambos have good spoor they like to hunt on the run, leaving Papa Zulu's command contingent scrambling to keep up.

Our four Casspir armored personnel carriers (APCs) with their light and heavy machine guns were strung out to the left and right of us trailing closely behind, their tires kicking up clouds of fine, white dust. Directly ahead lay the Angolan border. We crossed it on the run.

When I left Boulder, Colorado, in January of this year, it was 14 degrees below zero. *About 10 days later, along the Angolan border in the South West Africa operational area, it was pushing 100 degrees the* other way. I didn't need a thermometer to tell me that fact. Sweat and sunburn, mosquitos and mopani flies, and a definite craving for things cold, were enough to tell me I was in "wintertime" Africa. And scores of bush policemen armed with R5 rifles and 9mm pistols, mounting a variety of .50 cals, 7.62 MAGs and Brownings atop their Casspir APCs, made it clear that I was back in a combat zone.

It was my first trip to South West Africa (Namibia, if you prefer), as well as my first inside Angola. The former was an official visit, the latter — well, that's where my SWA Pol Tin (South West Africa Police Counterinsurgency Unit) team operated during my eight days with them. Before





saying that creates an international incident, let me add that both the SWA Pol Tin leadership and the policemen on the ground make a point of telling you that they don't maintain a permanent presence inside Angola, nor do they make a habit of running sorties inside Angola without just cause.

Their mission, as policemen, is to maintain law and order *inside* South West Africa, and that means stopping PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia) terrorists from infiltrating from their bases inside Angola down south to SWA. In real terms, this means that SWA Pol Tin teams conduct hot pursuit or follow-up operations for a limited distance into southern Angola when necessary. They are currently campaigning for an authorization to increase the scope of their external operations.

Why? Because the Marxist Angolan government — such as it is — couldn't stop PLAN cross-border incursions even if it wanted to, which of course it doesn't. The

**LEFT: Years of Angolan civil war have left most colonial Portuguese bush towns in shambles. Small arms, machine guns, and heavy-caliber rounds have taken their toll.**

**Papa Zulu's Owambos try to gather intelligence from a "local pop" concerning recent terrorist movements. If locals assist the security forces, they're usually in for deadly retribution from PLAN forces.**

SWA/Angolan border is one of those corners of the world where nobody is entirely in charge (on the Angolan side) and the local nasties like it that way. SWA Pol Tin accounts for something like 70 percent of all the terrorist kills inside SWA; their feeling is that if they can extend their operations northward, to the "safe" zones, the training and basecamp areas used by PLAN forces, then their mission as SWA policemen — which is to preserve the security of their country — can be accomplished much more effectively.

After working with SWA Pol Tin callsign Papa Zulu, I believe it.

Although my itinerary hadn't included a bushtrip with SWA Pol Tin, my interest in their operations jumped accordingly when I learned about their success rate in Owamboland's bush. I did have the offer to work with one of the SWATF (South West Africa Territory Force) military units ready to deploy for some ground-pounding COIN ops, but when Captain Bernie Ley, a longtime SWA Pol Tin vet, asked me, "Would you rather walk or ride for a week?" my infantryman's feet suggested that riding on a Casspir would be the better part of blisters.

With approval from SWA Pol Tin's commanding general (SWA Pol Tin's rank structure generally parallels the military's), I was hooked up with callsign Papa Zulu and readied to deploy with them.

Papa Zulu is one of several dozen operational teams SWA Pol Tin fields along the SWA/Angolan border. Each team consists of four Casspir or Turbo Wolf APCs, a Blesbok resupply vehicle, four or five white SWA or attached South African policemen as the leadership element, and 30-40 black Owambos as the team's trackers/firepower group.

A team's mission during ops is relatively simple: patrol a loosely defined geographical area, make intelligence contacts with the local population ("local pops" as SWA Pol Tin policemen call them), locate terrorist spoor, follow them up and make contact with the enemy.

That's their job, and they do it week in

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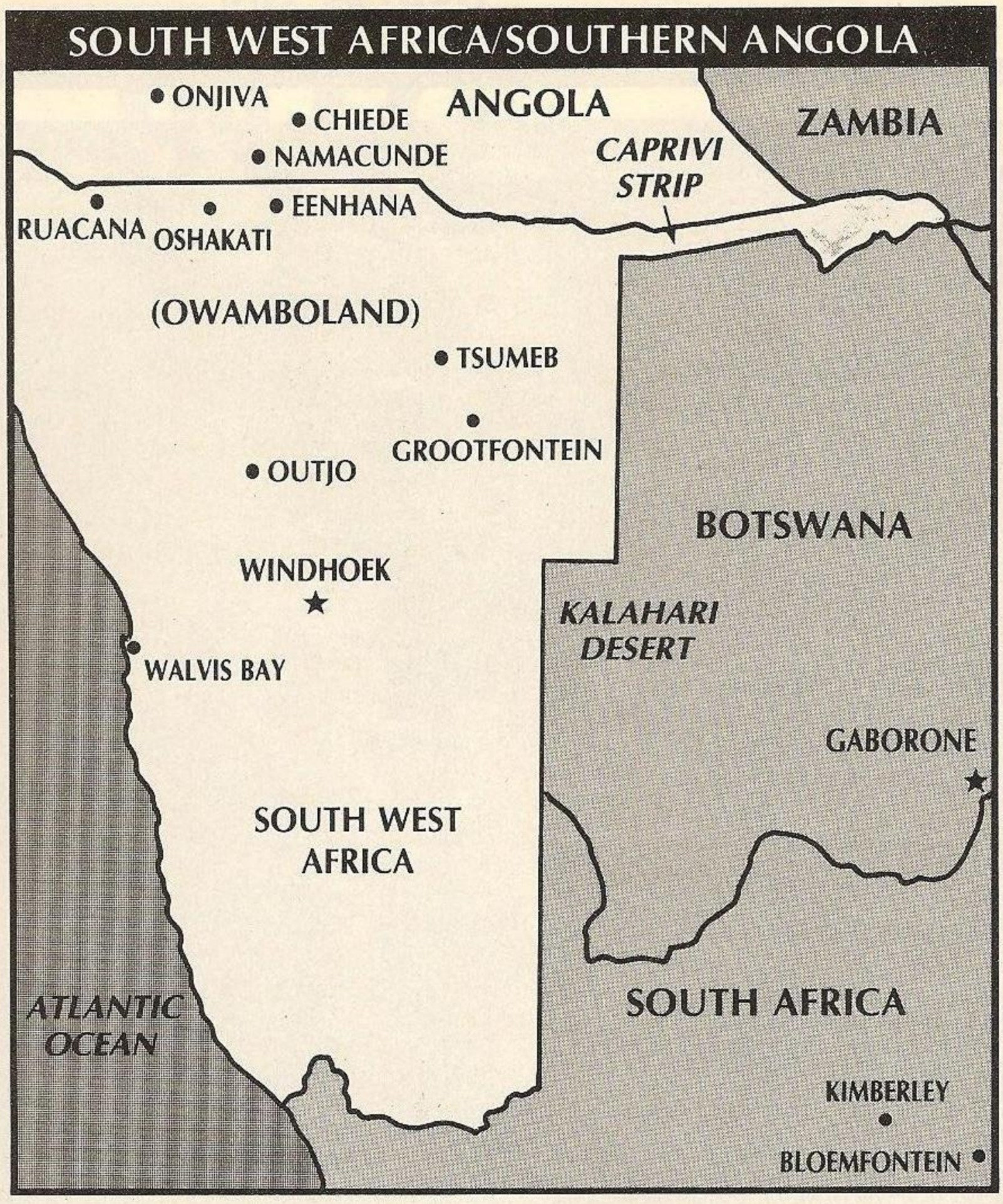



**Owamboland, which extends across the South West African/Angolan border, is SWA Pol Tin's prime hunting area for terrorists of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia.**

and week out. The men of Papa Zulu, both blacks and whites who had worked in the bush together for years, had literally hundreds of successful contacts behind them, including a contact which ended in 38 PLAN kills — one of the highest in SWA's counterinsurgency war to date.

But so far January had been a quiet month for SWA Pol Tin, and throughout the entire operational area in general. Terrorist infiltration usually begins with the rainy season, one reason being that until that time there's almost no water to be found in Owamboland's bush. Terrs may be a hearty breed, but even they need water. The rains were a bit late this year; by the time we deployed in late January, SWA Pol Tin had accounted for zero PLAN kills — compared with last year's total of 87 by the same date — and the teams were itching for contacts.

As we pulled out of SWA Pol Tin's Oshakati headquarters for our border patrol area I found myself assigned to Dave's car (I'll only use Papa Zulu's first names). Language was the primary reason. Although all the whites spoke English, for most of them Afrikaans was both their first language and the lingua franca between them and their Owambos as well. Dave was an Englishman who had served a number of years with the Rhodesian BSAP (British South Africa Police) before joining SWA Pol Tin in the early 1980s, and although he had learned Afrikaans out of necessity, English was his parent language.

Trouble hit us not more than 20 minutes down the road. Our Blesbok, which carried rations, ammo, fuel, spare parts and personal gear, went down alongside the road with a flat tire and an improperly fitted diesel filter. We finally left it with one Casspir, then continued up toward Eenhana, which would be our first night stop.

Enroute, word came over the radio that the military had picked up spoor of 15 terrorists by the border. The remaining three Casspirs of Papa Zulu, along with a number of other SWA Pol Tin teams in the area, started to converge on the grid of the spoor sighting. Although relations between the military and SWA Pol Tin are strained at times, both sides fully realize that the mounted police teams, with their superb Owambo trackers, are the best thing going when it comes to picking up, and then tracking down, terrorist spoor.

Dave, driving our Casspir and monitoring the radio through a pair of headphones, suddenly burst into laughter. Within a few moments, we had parked under a tree with the other two cars. He climbed out of the driver's seat and gave me the word.

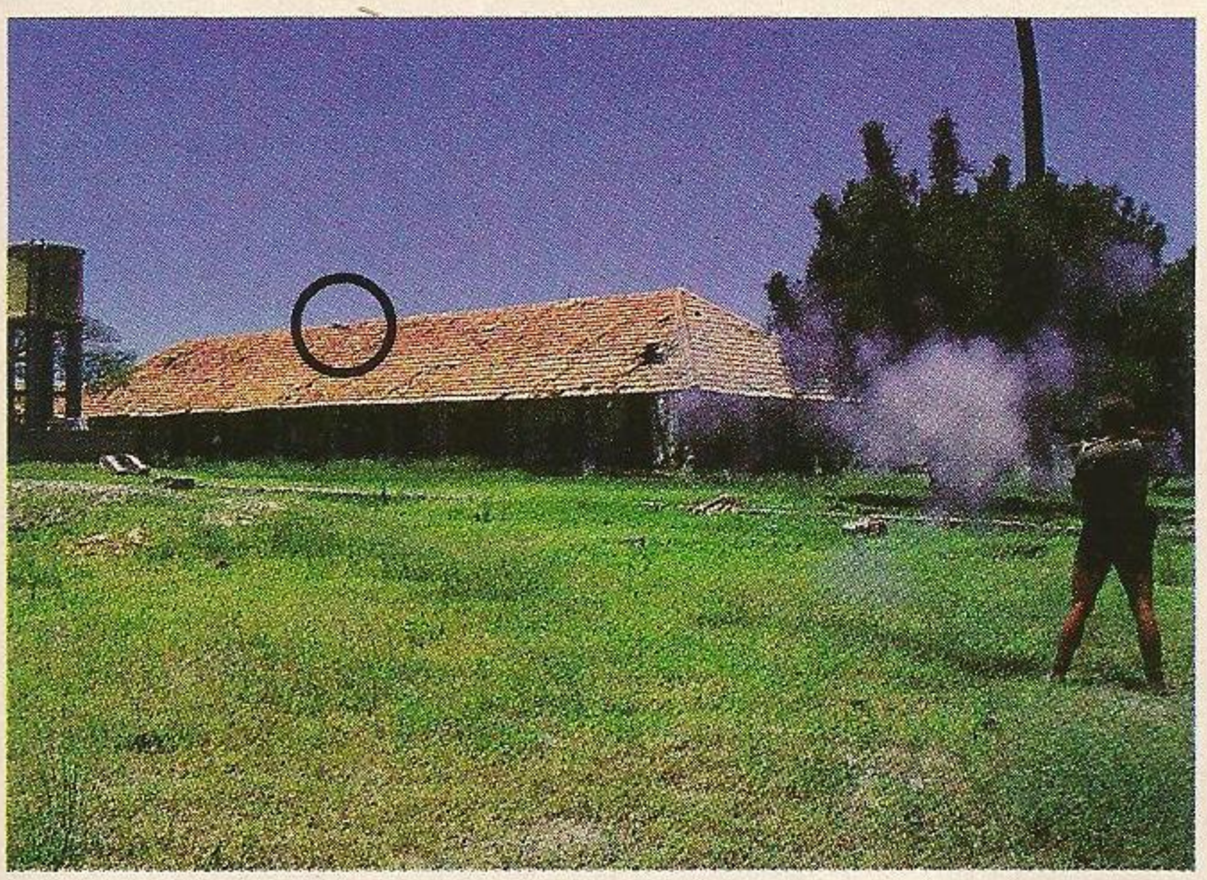
"The army was doing a 360 sweep around their basecamp and walked into their own spoor. Fuck all there."

Oh well. I knew a number of the army units in the SWA operational area were South African Infantry, many up from Cape Province with only limited bush knowledge. An Owambo, born and bred to tracking, would have known instantly; a young South African National Serviceman, unused to bush life, would decide prudence and a quick radio call the best options. It gave Papa Zulu a chuckle at any rate.

We pushed up the road to Eenhana (the only time we'd run on dirt roads, due to the landmine threat) and based up in a large, empty, open-air concrete building called a *stamkamtoor*, used by the Owamboland administration periodically to pay out pensions or hold public meetings. Our ailing Blesbok and the other Casspir finally joined us; the supply vehicle was still belching diesel and smoke from the engine. Everyone jumped in under the hood to have a look, and the decision was made to send it back to SWA Pol Tin's maintenance depot to have the filter properly refitted. Its absence wouldn't affect our next day's operations, as the Casspirs generally carried enough water and petrol for at least a few days.

That evening, after dinner and coffee (SWA Pol Tin policemen drink more coffee in the bush than any group of humans I've ever known; if PLAN really wants to win the war, all they have to do is cut off the coffee supply) but before the mosquitos attacked en masse, we chatted about their war, other wars around the world, our backgrounds — generally, all the things one talks about when you're in the bush. I'd done the same in Vietnam and Rhodesia. Coen, Wym, Pete, Chris and Dave — the leadership element of Papa Zulu — were, I found, no different than the people with whom I'd worked in the 5th Infantry Division at Quang Tri, or the Rhodesian Light Infantry in Salisbury. They were professionals, volunteers to a successful, bush-hardened and battle-scarred unit, who didn't consider themselves to be anything special, just policemen doing the job they were supposed to do.

It's an attitude you only find among the pros, people working under tough conditions where the likelihood of catching a bullet or an RPG-7 rocket or a landmine runs high; an attitude which allows you to accept that fact without being unduly worried about it, because you know that you and your people are better trained, equipped and



**RPG-7 rocket enroute to target in southern Angola.**

motivated than your enemy.

Although I'd only known them for a day, I felt I knew the type, and I went to sleep that night feeling better for it.

Morning comes early for SWA Pol Tin teams in the bush. First light hits, a few bites of meat from last night's *braaivleis* (barbeque), coffee (of course), and we were off. Dave was driving, one of his Owambos was up behind the coaxially mounted .50 cal M2 HB and 7.62mm MAG, while the rest of us sat up top, legs dangling inside the Casspir's open hatchway, heads continually ducking to avoid eating thorns and branches while we headed east into Africa's already blazing rising sun.

Papa Zulu's drill was simple: We had no hard intel to work from, so we had to go and find our own. After pushing east for 10 klicks, we turned north and started *kraal* (village) hopping, one car stopping to talk with the local pops, the rest leapfrogging forward to do the same elsewhere, all the while the Owambos scanning the ground for unusual spoor.

Answers we got from the locals were uniformly the same: We haven't heard or seen a terr for more than a year. We knew they were bullshitting us, and they knew we knew, but there was nothing we could do about it. Hearts and minds may not be a number one priority, but Papa Zulu knew that bashing heads only put the locals offsides, and made them harder to deal with in the future.

It was frustrating. At every stop Dave and his Owambos would dismount, separate the villagers, question them for about five minutes, remount, and Dave would say "fuck all." After a while, even Changela, the battle-scarred car boss, would climb back in the Casspir, look at me, shrug his shoulders and say "fuck all" — about the extent of his English.

By 1045 we were on our tenth kraal, yet another in a series of low, round mud huts topped with brown thatch, surrounded by a bush-wood fence, a few cattle or goats wandering about, with scattered-planting mealie fields wrenched from Owamboland's harsh, sandy/salty topsoil spreading out in all directions.

"Same," Dave said, climbing back into the Casspir. "They said they saw terrs last year."

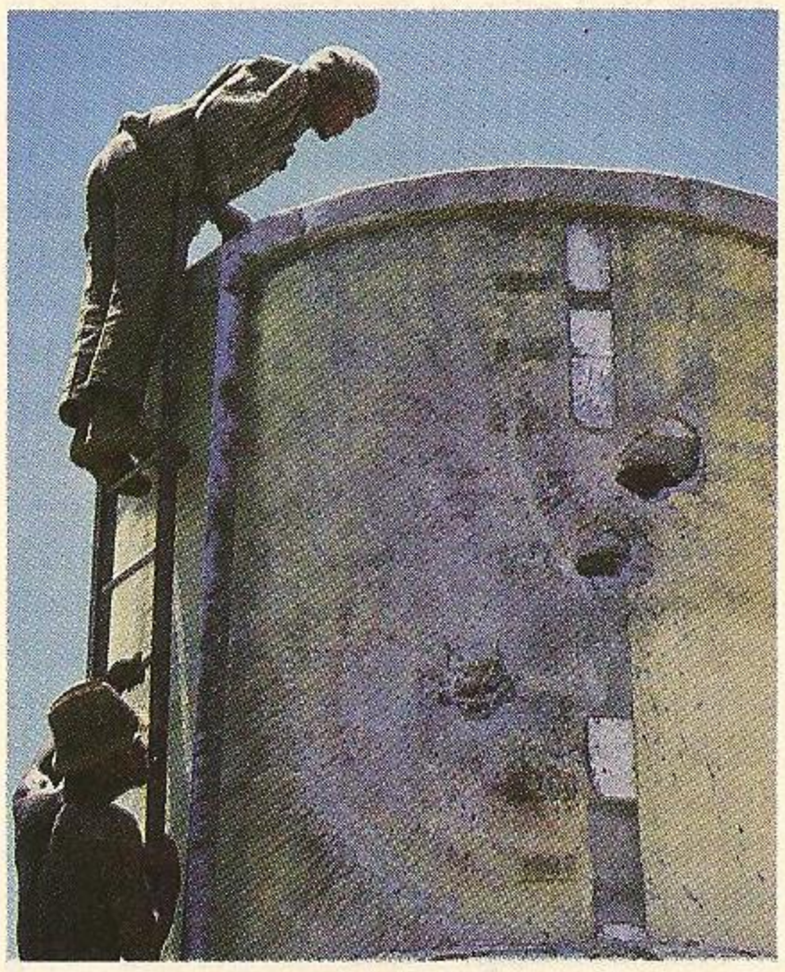
Another Vietnam/Rhodesia parallel. If the civvies help the security forces, the terrs usually find out about it and kill them. If they help the terrs — and admit it — then they're arrested and hauled off. The "I don't know a thing" road is the only one they can see to travel.

We broke for lunch about 1230, the whole team bitching about the lack of action, then hit the bush again about an hour later. I sweated under an intense blue/white sky, the sun sending heat waves shimmering off the bleached, white ground. Our Casspir's metal body was too hot to touch, and swarms of mopani flies, those insidious and maddening little bastards that go for eyes, nose, mouth and ears, kept me unpleasantly occupied.

Then, a shout from another car. One of the Owambos had picked up spoor, heading north. It was only tracks of one, and it was a day old, but it was enough to get everyone on the ground and running — literally. Once an Owambo picks up spoor, you might as well be following a super highway. As Dave said, "In Owamboland, there's no better tracker in the world than an Owambo, bushmen included." It was incredible; the merest imprint on the hard-packed ground, a pebble out of place, a stalk of sun-baked grass pushed aside might as well been six-foot-high signposts saying "This way!" to Papa Zulu's trackers.

With the four Casspirs spread out left and right of the spoor, the rest of us running up the middle, we crossed the Angolan border. There were enough old Casspir tracks criss-crossing the area to tell me that this wasn't the first time SWA Pol Tin had invited themselves inside Angola.

**Target!**



**Three rockets in a tight shot group.**

We stayed on the spoor for another half hour until we came across a kraal where the tracks terminated. After much discussion with the inhabitants, Papa Zulu determined that it had been a local pop — not a terr — that we'd been following. Nonetheless, everyone's spirits were up; local pop or not, it had been a chance to get out of the cars, track, and get a quick mental reacclimatization to the job.

We continued to work our way northward, casting left and right for more spoor, and stopping at every kraal to check out the terr situation. Nothing. Except for a still blistering sun at 1745, and a Casspir that bogged and was quickly recovered from one of the wet pans they call *shonas*, the rest of the afternoon was uneventful.

It was my first night in the bush with Papa Zulu, and I was interested in how they'd set up a night defensive position, especially considering that we were inside a rather

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hostile foreign country. Casual, I suppose, is the right word for it. The Casspirs were parked on the compass points (the region is entirely flat, covered with the same bush, scrub, and trees, so there really aren't any likely avenues of enemy approach) facing outward, but that was pretty much the extent of it. Cook fires were started, and there was no pretense of noise or light security. I asked one of the policemen about it.

"We hope we get hit," he told me over a cup of the ever-present coffee. "That'll give us something to follow up the next day." Probably not a strategy von Clausewitz would espouse, but something I could well imagine J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry or Robert Rogers' Rangers taking to heart.

But after years in Rhodesia, playing cat and mouse with terrs who loved to work — and attack — at night, it wasn't a set-up with which I felt entirely comfortable. As I lay in my cot, watching lightning flash in the east and satellites skim overhead north-to-south and east-to-west and listening to the evening birds and insects talk to themselves, I also made a few mental plans in case something wicked came my way.

The most likely candidates were a PG-7 rocket, 82mm mortar bomb, or shot-group full of AK rounds. To the first, I'd low crawl like hell away from the Casspirs; to the second, I'd run like hell and jump inside a Casspir; to the third, I'd low crawl like hell to a Casspir, grab the first available R5 with a 50-round magazine, then fire up the surrounding bushes — all, of course, with a bit of luck.

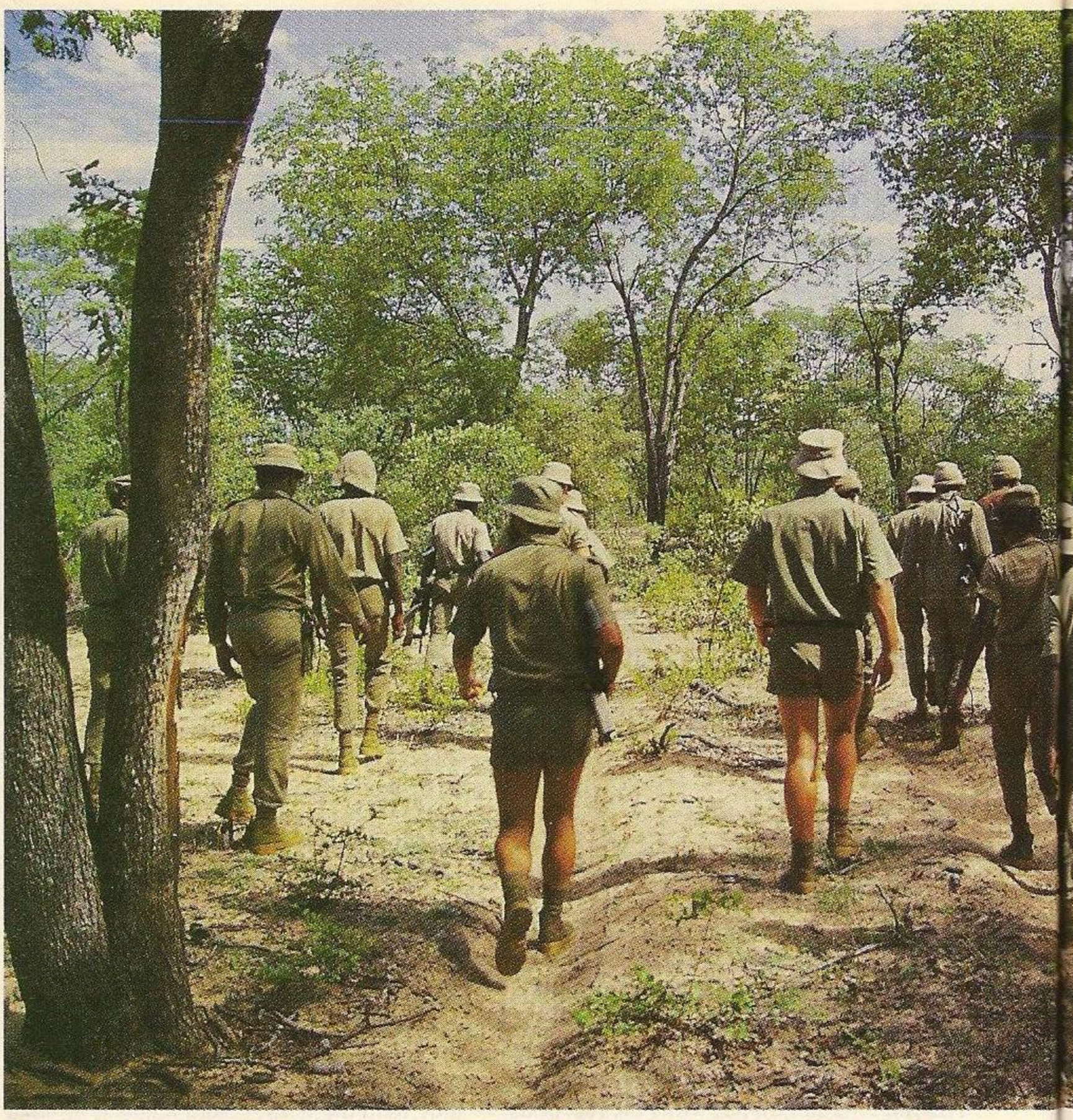
Except for a rather vicious mosquito attack, however, the night remained quiet.

Next morning, while we were downing coffee, word came from headquarters that terrs had blown the power lines south of Oshakati, and that a Casspir had hit a landmine on a dirt road south of Ruacana. "Shows that a few of them are getting through, anyway," was Dave's response, which set off a quick bitch session along the lines of "Why the hell can't they come through this way?"

I couldn't fault Papa Zulu on their enthusiasm.

We pulled out and drifted north toward Chiede, an old Portuguese town long abandoned, but a reference point for terrs headed toward South West Africa. We bush-busted the whole way, staying well away from any local roads or pathways, and Casspir tracks from past ops, because of the ever present landmine threat. No one was particulary worried about landmines in the sense that anyone would get hurt (Casspirs are tough chunks of machinery), but the embuggerance factor they represented if one blew off a tire was substantial.

Chiede was, in a word, a mess. Years of civil war had destroyed anything useful in what was once a well-constructed, picturesque colonial settlement hacked out of Angola's unforgiving bush. No building was unscathed; all were literally shot to pieces. We did a quick check, popped a few grenades down deep water storage tanks in the event someone who shouldn't have been there was, then pulled out of town, past old Angolan army zigzag trenches surrounding the place, and back into the bush.



**Team Papa Zulu on terrorist spoor. Once an Owambo tracker picks up the trail, it's like motoring along a well-signposted superhighway.**

Within minutes, we picked up spoor again.

There weren't many locals in the area, and Papa Zulu determined that if it wasn't a terr, he'd be worth talking to anyway. We all hopped out, leaving only the drivers (and Dave's alternate driver) with the Casspirs, while we started running on the spoor, through patches of Makalani and fan palm, mopani scrub, aloes, and platoons of *wag-n-bietjie* (pronounced, roughly, vak-n-bikkie, meaning "wait-a-little") thorn waiting to ambush unwary bodies rushing past. After 40-odd minutes, we realized we were in for a long haul. Whoever Mr. Footprint was, he knew we were after him because he'd started to run. With his spoor firmly established, we hopped back onto the cars and gave chase.

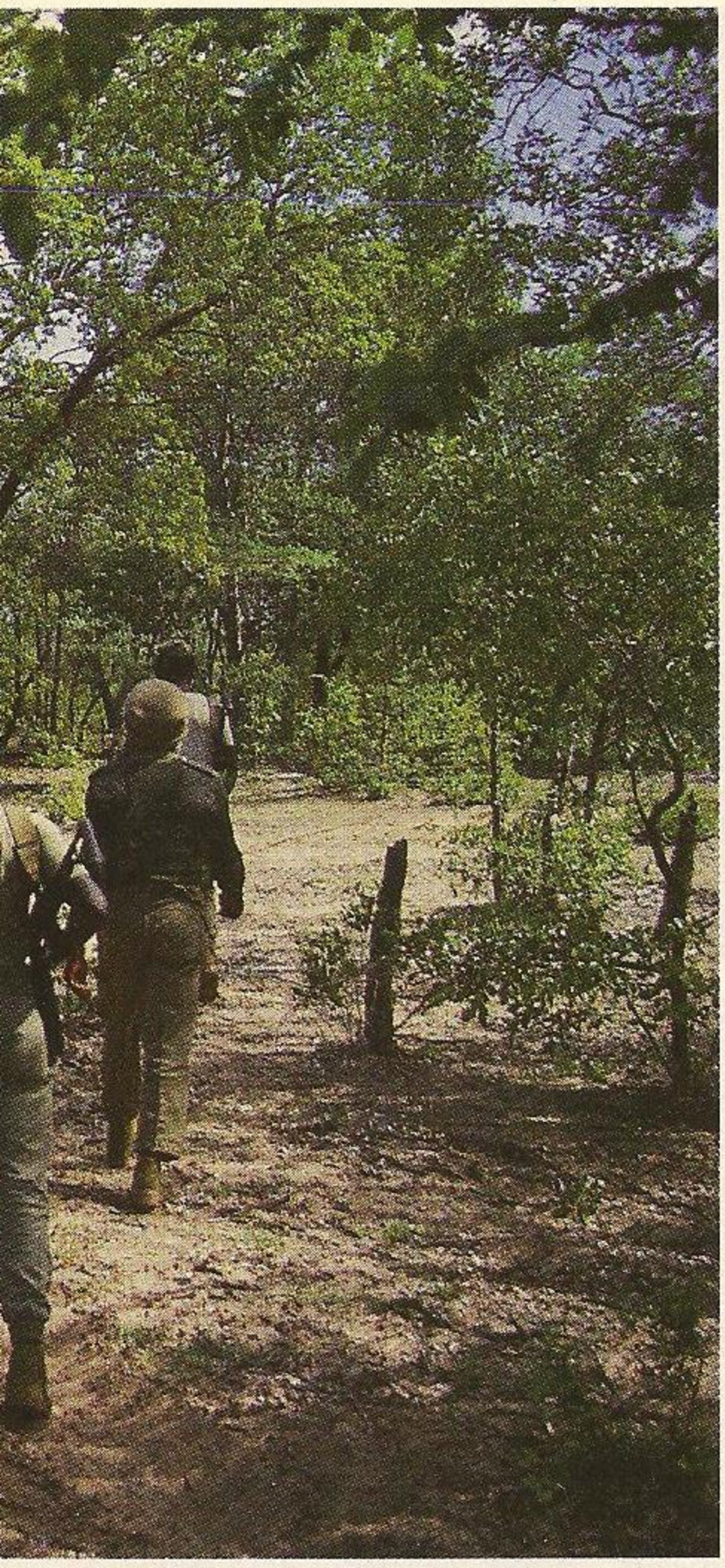
For three hours we bushwhacked, following his tracks to the north, then east, then south, then angling northward again. We stopped at the few kraals we passed ("Didn't see or hear a thing" — how odd) until we finally met with some success. Yes, we were told at one kraal, a fellow did come here a while ago. He rested until he could hear your engines, then he took off running again.

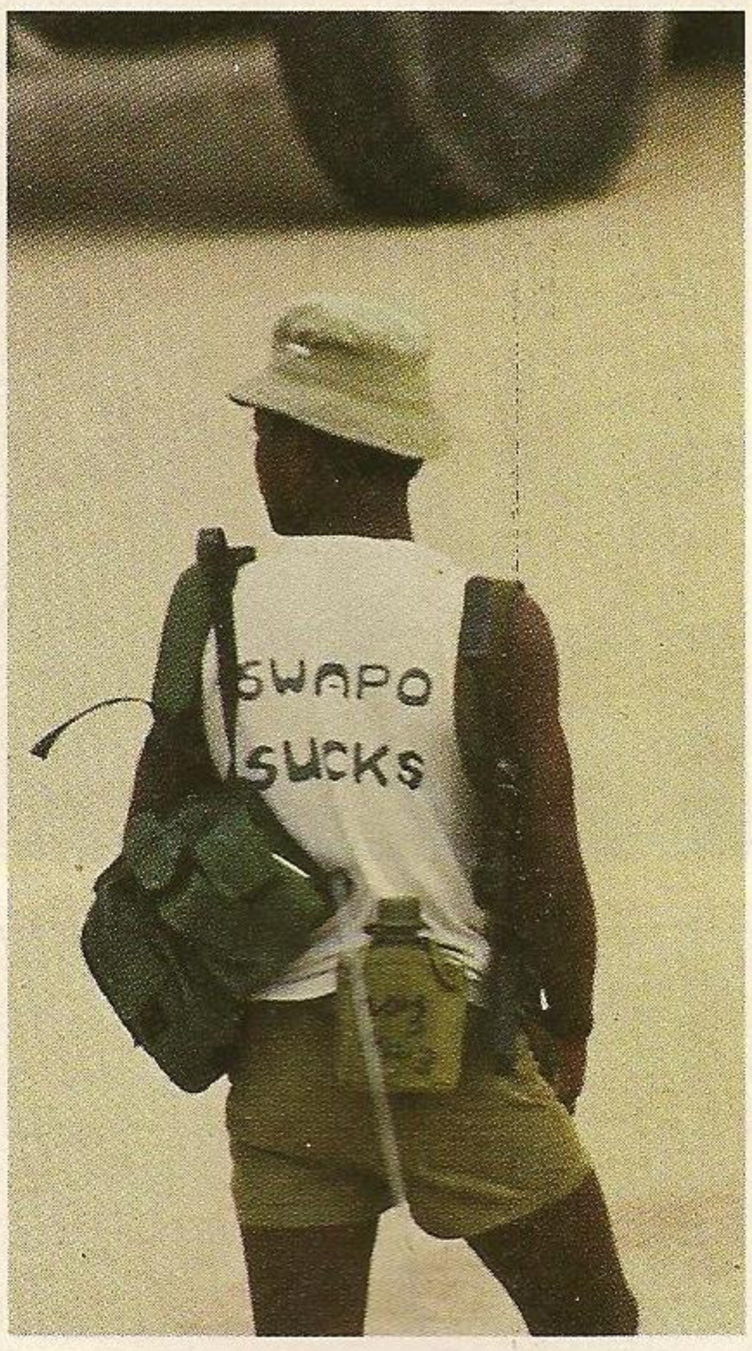
Coen, the solidly built and bushwise team commander, made a quick decision: we'd do a silent follow-up in the hope that our rabbit would think we'd given up the chase. Little did I know then just what "silent follow-up" entailed.

R5s, webbing and chest bandoliers were broken out, a few gulps of water thrown back, and we were off on a footrace, leaving the Casspirs to follow us out of earshot.

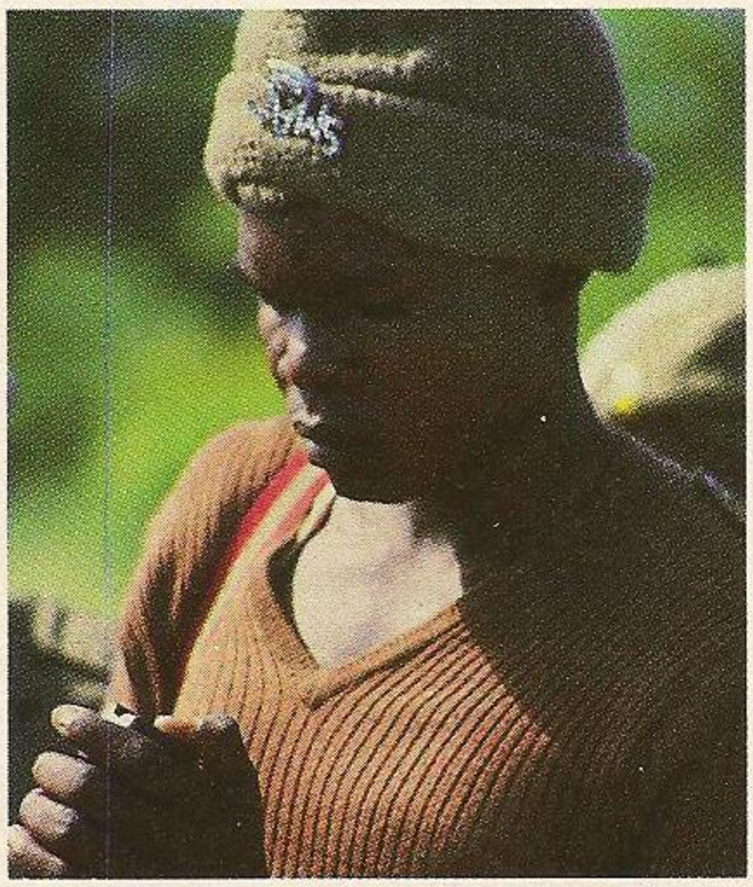
It was 1310 when we took off, the sun burning my already burnt arms, the heat baking up through my track shoes. Again, I was truly amazed by the Owambos' ability to track over rock-hard, barren ground. Even when the spoor was pointed out to me, and even though I nearly put my nose on the ground to see it, I couldn't (fortunately for my ego at least, the other whites had a hard time seeing it too).

It was a man-killing pace we kept, at least to a journalist along for the ride, and it never






**ABOVE: T-shirt reflects SWA Pol Tin's attitude toward their adversaries, the political element which controls People's Liberation Army of Namibia terrorists.**



**LEFT: SWA Pol Tin tracker. I was told that no one, including Bushmen, is better at tracking in Owamboland than Owambos — and I believe it.**

slackened. When the spoor was good, we ran. When it was fair, we fast-walked. When even the Owambos had to cast around for it, we stood in the shade and sweated. It was, however, much more the former than the latter.

For five hours and 20 minutes, some 30 kilometer's worth, we stalked Mr. Fleet-of-Foot around the Angolan countryside. We knew we had a terr when later in the day he started anti-tracking, making it tough for even the best Owambo tracker to pick him up again. Finally, at 1830, we called it a day. Our quarry, Coen figured, was still some five klicks in front of us, and there'd be little chance of running him down before dark. Whoever he was, I had to give him points for pure physical stamina. We'd been on his ass for nearly nine hours, three when we were hot-pursuiting by vehicle, and he still managed to stay a jump ahead. Whatever secrets he may have had, he was going to keep them — at least this time around.

We called the Casspirs up by radio, then guided them and our now fixed Blesbok in by shooting thousand-footers (Icarus-type parachute flares) up every so often. I half expected everyone to sort of shag out early, but even I perked up after coffee and a meal of hot ration-pack chicken curry served out of a communal bowl. Spirits were high, mostly I think because of the chase. Papa Zulu, and I'm sure the rest of SWA Pol Tin, are hunters at heart, and the thrill of the chase is often more rewarding than what sometimes turns out to be an anticlimactic ending. The Owambos were laughing and talking, we were laughing and talking, and suddenly it felt very good to be in the bush again with people with whom I felt a definite kinship.

That night, watching the evening's array of satellites crisscross the star-studded, deep black African sky, I wondered if I could pick up on this sort of life again. I felt I'd done OK on the ground follow-ups during the past few days, even for being the oldest fellow in callsign Papa Zulu. I enjoyed Africa's bushveld, I enjoyed the camaraderie, and I enjoyed the hunt as much as anyone there. I fell asleep without finding an answer.

Coffee and Lexington cigarettes kick-started my heart the next morning while I cleaned up my cameras, thick with Owamboland dust. Papa Zulu was, by this time, frustrated as hell that we hadn't made any contacts with PLAN terrorists, partly because they wanted to give me a good action story for the magazine. Well, the trip wasn't over. We still had a few days left before returning to Oshakati, and a lot could still happen.

Our heavy-duty diesels rumbled back to life, their fumes something I'd grown accustomed to over the past days, and we pushed off south, following our jackrabbit's spoor of the day before. We were about 15 kilometers east of Onjiva, a FAPLA (Angolan armed forces)/PLAN stronghold, and there'd been some lighthearted talk the night before about giving it a rev if nothing else panned out. But lighthearted talk was all it was. SWA Pol Tin had strict instructions to give Onjiva a wide berth although that standing order did cause some heartburn down on the ground. Pragmatically though, Papa Zulu knew enough to leave the place alone because it festered with 82mm mortars and 122mm rocket launchers, more than enough to give Papa Zulu a very hard time during a standoff engagement.

(A few weeks after I left, in retaliation for a PLAN car-bomb attack against Oshakati which resulted in the death of 24 black and three white civilians, along with scores of injured, South African Air Force Impalas and Mirages launched a massive aerial attack against Onjiva and other FAPLA/PLAN bases. The raids were termed "successful.")

As sometimes happens in counterinsurgency operations, we struck pay dirt within a half hour of moving out. Local pops at one kraal told us that three soldiers, wearing brand new uniforms and carrying AKs and an RPG, passed by yesterday around 1100, heading for Chiede from the direction of Onjiva.

Instantly, Papa Zulu's Owambos were casting out for spoor, and they soon found it. We were almost 21 hours behind them with a lot of catching up to do. With Owambos from another car physically staying on the spoor, the rest of us cast forward, hoping to pick it up again in front. When we did, a new set of trackers would take over, those behind on the spoor would remount their Casspir and catch up, then we'd repeat the

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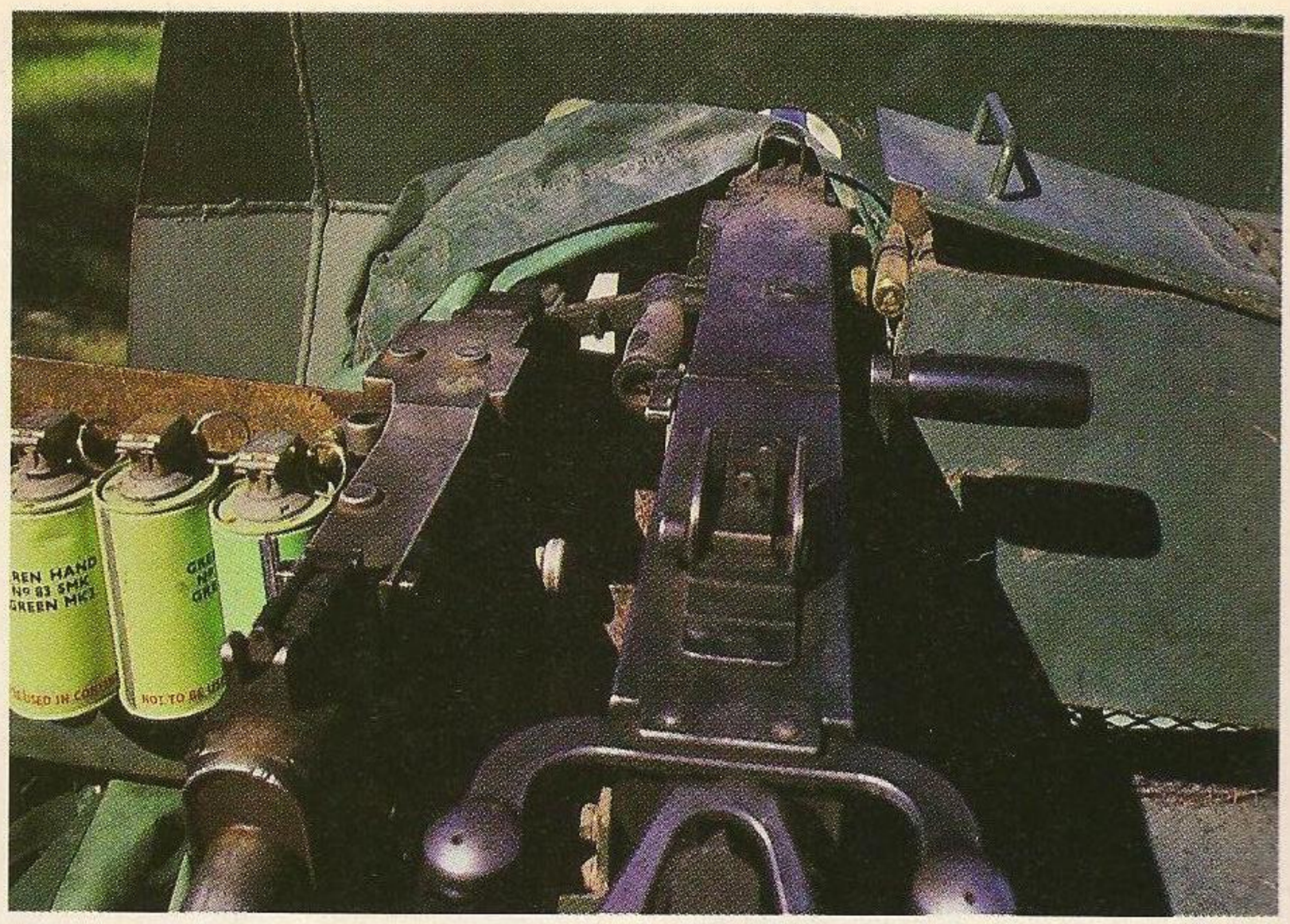
process.

It was long, tedious work, but it was the bread-and-butter operation of SWA Pol Tin. As it had every other day, the inside of our Casspir was rapidly filling up with branches, leaves and thorn, dumped back through the open top hatch as the car smashed its way through the bush, along with various green, white and brown spiders, crickets, praying mantises, grasshoppers and caterpillars — all of which seemed to have a definite affinty for the open space



**A .50-caliber M2 HB and a coaxially mounted 7.62mm MAG 58 formed the firepower for our Casspir APC. SWA Pol Tin's teams carry a variety of different machine gun combinations up in the turret.**

## TWENTY-TWO YEARS OF WAR

Even the name of this vast (823,145 square kilometer) country in southwestern Africa is unclear. Germany, colonizing back in the 1880s, called it South-West Africa (SWA), and that name's still widely used. Others, including the United Nations, label it Namibia, that name stemming in part from the great Namib coastal desert. Many tack them both together, ending up with a name that gives international telephone operators fits.

From the 1880s until early in World War I, the Imperial German government ruled this mineral-rich area, until physically losing it to troops of the Union of South Africa in 1915. After the war, SWA, along with the rest of Germany's overseas possessions, fell under the jurisdiction of the League of Nations, forerunner to the present-day United Nations. The League's responsibility was to find an appropriate country to administer the territory.

On 17 December 1920, the League conferred a mandate upon His Britannic Majesty, a mandate to be exercised on his behalf by the government of the Union of South Africa. This mandate, a "C" class, meant that the Union of South Africa would have full administrative and legislative authority over SWA, and that SWA would be looked at as an integral part of the Union. However, the Union could not annex SWA and make it its fifth province although there were many who pushed for that option and still, in fact, do today.

Years of convoluted external and internal political wranglings concerning the future of SWA followed. For purposes of understanding the current unpleasantness, the narrative begins on 19 April 1960 when a particulary militant group, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), came into its own.

SWAPO was the successor to a number of earlier ethnic political organizations, and was heavily influenced by the militant African National Congress (ANC), the South African Liberal Party and South African Communist Party, as well as groups immersed in Maoist and Trotskyite ideology. With that sort of political bent, it's a fair assumption that Moscow took more than a bit of interest in SWAPO.

Riding the wave of armed nationalism sweeping Africa around this period, SWAPO in 1962 endorsed the concept of armed struggle for itself, and shortly thereafter opened offices in Europe, Africa, the United States and, of course, Moscow.

During the early to mid-1960s SWAPO immersed itself in revolutionary philosophy, but the organization itself was never banned in SWA as the ANC has been in South Africa. This even in the face of its alignment with the liberation movements fighting the Portuguese in Angola, and its direct ties to Moscow, from which it began to receive increasing amounts of Soviet aid.

SWAPO's first major military engagement on 26 August 1966 was a less than stunning example of insurgent warfare: South African Police hit a SWAPO training and recruiting base in central Owamboland and wiped it out.

Terrorist attacks on the local farming areas dropped dramatically after that, and didn't pick up again until the mid-70s when Portugal pulled out of Angola, thus providing SWAPO with an external base of operations.

On the political front, however, SWAPO was doing better.

In October 1966, after much lobbying by SWAPO, the United Nations General Assembly voted to terminate South Africa's mandate over SWA, and then unilaterally changed its name to Namibia.

And early the next year, in May, the U.N. Council for Namibia was formed by U.N. General Assembly Resolution 2248, its purpose being that of an in absentia administrator of SWA. Sitting on this impartial council are such "non-aligned" countries as the USSR, Algeria, Angola, Bulgaria, Finland, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Zambia. SWAPO, but no other SWA representatives, sits as an observer.

Finally, in 1976 the U.N. General Assembly recognized SWAPO as the "sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people."

Interestingly, the United Nations has managed to choose the one organization dedicated to armed insurrection, and whose political program for the future, as stated in the authoritative *Political Who's Who of Namibia*, is to "combat . . . colonialism and capitalist and imperialist exploitation and to unite particularly the working class, the peasantry and progressive intellectuals in the aim of building a classless, non-exploitive society based on the ideals and principles of scientific socialism."

As SWAPO's Secretary for Publicity and Information, Hidipo Hamutenya, said in an interview published in *The Namibian* (SWAPO's local newspaper in SWA) on 8 January '88, "The demand for independence has in recent years produced a yearning for radical

between my neck and shirt collar. One either rode inside and put up with the hailstorm of local flora and fauna, or stood up top and got whacked and thrashed by low-hanging branches and thorn scrub. I moved into the driver's compartment with Dave and decided to sweat it out there.

As the day wore on, we started closing the gap. Our quarry had made no effort to anti-track, leading us to believe that they were inexperienced or overly complacent. We'd quit casting forward by this stage; all of us were on the ground, running or fast walking as the spoor dictated. Kilometers slid by under the scorching afternoon sun, sweat poured off us, and we could only slake our thirst from the sedentary and very hot water from the occasional shona we passed.

But we were closing, and quickly. We started casting forward again, hoping to run the three terrorists to ground. Vehicles began overheating as they crashed through some incredibly thick bush, but the Owambos running on spoor never seemed to tire, or break much more than a mild sweat. Coen had been keeping headquarters advised of our progress, and callsigns Zulu One Mike and Zulu Sierra soon joined us. Apparently, we had the hottest thing going in our AO.

Soon, the team leaders felt we were close enough to the terrs to call in an air force chopper team, and within a few minutes, two Alouettes were circling. It was a good melding of air and ground assets. While the SWA Pol Tin teams stayed on spoor, one of the choppers would advance up the terrs' direction of travel, hoping to spot them or run them to ground, while the other bird flew top cover. We heard the crack-crack-crack, then deep-throated whump-whump-whump of 20mm cannon shells firing, then impacting, up ahead of us. One Alouette gunner thought he'd seen movement, but it didn't pan out.

Then the tracks split up, the terrs bomb-shelling and anti-tracking all the way. Apparently, they weren't novices after all. Our three teams split up, one staying on the center spoor while the other two jumped forward, hoping to cut the terrs off. No luck;

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social change, and in modern times, the yearning for social liberation from capitalist exploitation has found its most forceful expression in Marxism."

Needless to say, there has been "brisk" international discussion as to the future of SWA/Namibia as well as major internal political strides; the latter, unfortunately, seem to be for naught. SWAPO's external leader, Sam Nujoma (SWAPO president and member of its Politburo and Central Committee), refuses to have anything to do with the internal political process, as does the United Nations.

In its U.N. Security Council Resolution 435, adopted on 29 September 1978, it "Declares that all unilateral measures taken by the illegal administration in Namibia in relation to the electoral process ... are NULL and VOID." (Their upper casing, not mine.) In other words, regardless of any progress made by Namibians themselves, the United Nations will refuse to recognize it.

One major problem, as viewed by much of the international community, is the Republic of South Africa. A South African administrator general sits over the current SWA Transitional Government of National Unity, representing South African interests in SWA and acting as the political conduit between the SWA and South African governments. Although South Africa is on record as planning to move SWA toward independence, it still controls key functions such as external defense, foreign affairs, customs and excise, and foreign currency.

In real terms, as one SWA government official told me, "South Africa is heavily involved in politics in South West Africa and pursues controlled change. But when change comes too quickly, Pretoria makes waves that roll right over us."

One area that harbors the greatest potential for change in SWA is United Nations Security Council Resolution 435, the "implementation of the proposal for a settlement of the Namibian situation" based on the Western Settlement Plan of 10 April 1978.

Most parties involved, including South Africa and SWAPO, have agreed to the basics of U.N. 435, which establishes, among other things, a U.N. special representative to oversee free and fair elections in Namibia, ensure the release of all political prisoners and the return of Namibian refugees, monitor the cessation of all hostile acts as well as a phased withdrawal of South African forces, and in general, send Namibia on its way to independence.

A key stumbling block to the implementation of U.N. 435 is Washington's and Pretoria's linkage of it to the withdrawal of the estimated 40,000 Cuban troops from Angola. The Moscow-aligned government in Luanda knows full well that to withdraw Cuban troops now may mean victory for Jonas Savimbi's UNITA forces — and a major setback for Soviet policy in southern Africa — and hence it's unlikely that Moscow will allow that to happen. It's a superpower gaming point, and one not likely to be resolved anytime soon.

Nor is PLAN's (SWAPO's military wing) role in Angola likely to change anytime soon, either. Much to its chagrin, PLAN is forced to play a major role in the fighting against Savimbi's UNITA forces by supplying a mechanized brigade of some 2,800 troops, including tanks and artillery, in return for Luanda allowing PLAN to operate from Angolan territory. Considering that PLAN consists of approximately 8,700 troops in toto (scattered about in administrative, defensive, offensive and training components in Angola, Zambia, Botswana and SWA), that's a heavy price to pay.

PLAN has tried, with very limited success, to infiltrate its insurgent component of 1,200 terrorists through Owamboland in the north-central area of SWA along the Angolan border into the farming areas of Grootfontein, Tsumeb and Outjo. They've run up against SWATF (South West Africa Territory Force) and SWA Pol Tin (South West Africa Police Counterinsurgency Unit) forces who know the local bush as well as, and in most cases better than, PLAN terrorists operating out of Angola. A senior military intelligence officer in Windhoek told me that "50 percent of PLAN's beginning insurgent force gets killed every year." SWATF figures list 918 killed in 1983; 584 in '84; 599 in '85; 645 in '86; and 747 in '87. Not inspiring figures if you're a PLAN recruiting officer trying to drum up business.

Recruiting is, in fact, a major problem for the guerrillas.

SWATF reckons that PLAN requires at least 1,100 insurgents in SWA to be effective on a yearly basis, and with around 500-plus biting the dust each year, that means 500 more bodies have to be found. According to their intelligence sources, SWATF believes that some 200 recruits, eager or otherwise, signed on during 1987, but that the other 300 or so came from refugee camps in central Angola.

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# 22 YEARS OF WAR

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for Human Rights and the Parents Committee of Namibia document mass incarcerations, torture and killing in SWAPO "refugee" camps in Angola, suggesting that joining PLAN isn't an entirely voluntary act of revolutionary fervor.

In addition to security force actions, SWAPO/PLAN also face a very real threat from the local population: Voluntary reports from local citizens, which have led to the killing/capturing of terrorists and the recovery of their equipment, have jumped from 64 to 1983 to 1,868 by November 1987. As a result, terrorist incidents inside SWA (which include contacts and ambushes, mine incidents, intimidation of the local population, and sabotage) have steadily dropped from 756 recorded incidents in 1982 to 483 in 1987.

This does not make SWAPO/PLAN's backers — the Soviet Union which ships arms and ammunition directly from the USSR to the Angolan coastal city of Namibe for PLAN's use and supplies advisers to their training camps; countries such as the Netherlands and Cuba which supply food and other supplies; and groups such as the World Council of Churches which funnel vast amounts of cash to PLAN — happy people.

Hence political denunciations of the "fascist apartheid regime" for killing thousands of innocent, peace and freedom loving "refugees" escalate in direct proportion to PLAN's combat failures.

What they fail to mention, though, is that those same, poor "refugees" managed to lose 761 grenades, 623 rifles, 1,323 rifle grenades, 48 machine guns, 124 82mm mortars and 3,081 mortar bombs, 3 surface-to-air missiles, 79 RPG-7 rocket launchers and 1,010 rockets, 5 limpet mines, and 35 122mm rockets in 1987 to the security forces. And in case there was any doubt as to their intent, they also managed to leave 479 anti-vehicle and 569 anti-personnel mines lying about for some unwary soul to chance upon.

Militarily, as SWATF and SWA Pol Tin sources will tell you, PLAN is getting beat. And when insurgent forces wind up losing in the field, they turn to other methods — in this case sabotage of government installations, television and radio transmission towers, electricity supply lines, bridges, railroad lines, and since the beginning of 1987, high-profile "soft" targets such as Windhoek and holiday resort areas.

"The Kremlin trains these men," my intel briefer said. "They decide on the strategy and go for this kind of thing." And it is effective in the sense that every time something goes boom in SWA, the international media is quick to pick it up.

It's a well-orchestrated public relations campaign run by Moscow and PLAN's U.N. supporters, and it's highly cost-effective: PLAN need only plant a pound or two of explosives here and there without wasting the lives of its field troops, and they get all the publicity they need.

How long will the low-intensity war in South West Africa/Namibia drag on? Excluding politics, the status quo could run on forever. But it's the politicians who will eventually decide SWA's fate. Unfortunately, the superpowers are too busy playing international chess with each other to really care about what happens to pawns like South West Africa/Namibia, and the people who live there. But that's 20th Century *realpolitik*, and we're all stuck with it.

# INTO ANGOLA

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no spoor found, and even the tracking team had lost theirs.

It was a disappointed bunch of policemen — not to mentioned one journalist — who sucked down coffee and grazed rat packs that night. Everyone could nearly taste a contact, but the bastards had slipped out of the net. Next morning, Owambos scattered out on the ground for kilometers, trying to pick up at least one of the spoor, but without any luck.

Zulu One Mike and Zulu Sierra took off back to their own AOs, and we started drifting eastward, toward the old Portuguese town of Namacunde, about 10 kilometers north of SWA along a tar road. These old towns made good staging areas and reference points for PLAN terrs headed south, so we thought we'd give it a once-over.

Namacunde, like Chiede, had seen its share of fighting between UNITA, Jonas Savimbi's pro-Western democratic forces, and the Angolan government's FAPLA, as well as a few brief forays by the SADF (South African Defense Force). Namacunde's solid buildings, built a foot or more thick against the torrid African heat, were pockmarked and shot through by thousands of small arms rounds, machine-gun fire, and heavier caliber weapons. It had undoubtedly been a pretty town — in a former lifetime.

We set up our night position in a field across the tar road, and I took the opportunity to gain a little hands-on experience with the R5 and its 50-round magazine, as well as Chris' Czech CZ 75 pistol, before the sun went down.

We were sitting next to Coen's car, drinking coffee and chatting around 2100, when we heard engine noises coming from the north along the tar road. We knew it wasn't another SWA Pol Tin by the pitch of the engines.

"Ratels, I think," Coen said, referring to the military's APCs, but we weren't 100 percent sure.

"Might be a FAPLA convoy coming down from Onjiva to drop off some terrs," Dave added, and that was the way we played it. The sounds of 30-odd R5s locking and loading, and .50 cals, MAGs, and Brownings charging, made me start to wish I had carried something a bit more lethal than the camera I was now pointing down range.

Six vehicles rumbled into sight under the brilliant full moon, backdropped by the white buildings of Namacunde. From my vantage point they *looked* South African, but...

Coen shot up a thousand footer which bathed us, and the convoy, in its intense magnesium light. The convoy slowed. "Send up another," he called to Dave, now over in his car, and Dave sent one airborne. So far, no response from the now crawling convoy. Dave went to fire his second rocket up over the convoy but it malfunctioned, nearly exploding in his hands and shooting the flare out the wrong end down into the ground just behind the Casspir.

"Hey! Are you all right?" I called.

"Yeah...No, I think I've burned my hands."

Just then, the convoy answered our flares with one of its own, and continued to rumble off down south.

Dave's hands were fried, both a puffed-up mass of burned, dead-white skin. Our medic covered them with burn salve and bandages, and gave him antibiotics and painkillers, but we knew he'd have to see a doctor soon.

As it was, our night still wasn't over. Around 0100, I could hear mortars exploding far to the east. Then, near 0400, two Alouettes and a Puma, one of the Alouettes with its searchlight on, came flying low and slow overhead, heading east. Around first light, we got the word. An army company (which I had happened to visit before linking with SWA Pol Tin) had been stonked by 20 82mm mortar bombs and taken some serious casualties. Hence the casevac choppers we had seen.

We were the closest team, and we wasted no time in revving over to the army's position where we linked up with one of their lieutenants. He told us that the convoy we'd seen last night had been their resupply vehicles, and that they'd had to use flares earlier to guide them onto their position. Once the supplies were dropped off the convoy had departed, but the company had stayed in place.

It was obviously not a tactically sound maneuver, and I could see from the young officer's face that it would haunt him for the rest of his life — the company had three KIA and five wounded.

They had located the 82's baseplate position, and we picked up the spoor from there. Six of them: four headed straight back to Onjiva about 15 klicks away, where we knew they'd already be drinking Cokes and patting themselves on the back, but the other two had headed west toward the abandoned Omupanda Mission Station on the tar road. We set out after them.

It was either a feint, a ruse, or misdirection on their part, because within a few kilometers, their spoor turned northwest — toward off-limits Onjiva. We still stayed with it as long as we thought it safe, then had to break off. There was always the chance we were being led into an ambush the closer we came to Onjiva.

We took a look at Omupanda Mission Station at any rate — again, another nearly destroyed Portuguese town — then headed south along the tar back toward SWA to refuel and water, and to have Dave's hands checked out. It was basically the end of our week out, so Dave, his crew, and I headed back to SWA Pol Tin HQ at Oshakati.

I saw them all again a few days later when they stood a unit formation prior to standdown. I was sorry to be leaving. They were a good crew and I would have liked to deploy with them again — especially now that the rains had started and the PLAN infiltration season was beginning in earnest — but my schedule wouldn't allow for it.

We shook hands and I wished them well, hoping then, as I still do now, that they all managed to stay out of harm's way. I don't think that's too much to ask.