

SADF Military Operations 1975 -1989



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Chapter 2

Operation Savannah (Angola)

This article is about the South African invasion of Angola. For the World War II military operation, see [Operation Savannah](#).

Operation Savannah was the South African Defence Force's 1975–1976 covert intervention in the Angolan Civil War.

2.1 Background

Main articles: [Angolan War of Independence](#), [Angolan Civil War](#) and [Cuba in Angola](#)

The so-called "Carnation Revolution" of 25 April 1974 ended Portugal's colonial government, but Angola's three main liberation forces, [National Liberation Front of Angola](#) (FNLA), [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola](#) (UNITA) and the [People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola](#) (MPLA) began competing for dominance in the country. Fighting began in November 1974, starting in the capital city, [Luanda](#), and spreading quickly across all of Angola, which was soon divided among the combatants. The FNLA occupied northern Angola and UNITA the central south, while The MPLA mostly occupied the coastline, the far south-east and, after capturing it in November 1974, [Cabinda](#). Negotiations for independence resulted in the Treaty of [Alvor](#) being signed on 15 January 1975, naming the date of official independence as 11 November 1975. The agreement ended the war for independence but marked the escalation of the civil war. Two dissenting groups, the [Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda](#) and the [Eastern Revolt](#), never signed the accords, as they were excluded from negotiations. The coalition government established by the Treaty of Alvor soon ended as nationalist factions, doubting one another's intentions, tried to control the country by force.^{[1][2]} Fighting between the three forces resumed in Luanda hardly a day after the transitional government assumed office on 15 January 1975.^{[3][4][5][6]}

The liberation forces sought to seize strategic points, most importantly the capital, by the official day of independence. The MPLA managed to seize Luanda from the FNLA whilst UNITA retreated from the capital. By March 1975, the FNLA was driving towards Luanda from the north, joined by units of the [Zairian](#) army which the [United States](#) had encouraged Zaire to provide.^[7] Between 28 April and early May, 1,200 Zairian troops crossed into northern Angola to assist the FNLA.^{[8][9]} The FNLA eliminated all remaining MPLA presence in the northern provinces and assumed positions east of [Kifangondo](#) on the eastern outskirts of Luanda, from where it continued to encroach on the capital.^{[10][11]} The situation for the MPLA in Luanda became increasingly precarious.^[6]

The MPLA received supplies from the [Soviet Union](#) and repeatedly requested 100 officers for military training from [Cuba](#). Until late August, Cuba had a few technical advisors deployed in Angola.^[12] By 9 July, the MPLA gained control of the capital, Luanda.

Starting 21 August, Cuba established four training facilities (CIR) with almost 500 men, which were to train about 4,800 FAPLA recruits in three to six months.^{[13][14]} The mission was expected to be short-term and to last about 6 months.^[15] The CIR in [Cabinda](#) accounted for 191 instructors, while [Benguela](#), Saurimo (formerly Henrique de Carvalho) and at N'Dalatando (formerly Salazar) had 66 or 67 instructors each. Some were posted in headquarters in Luanda or in other places throughout the country. The training centres were operational by 18–20 October.^[16]

2.2 Military intervention



South African Eland armoured cars in a forward staging area just prior to Operation Savannah.

South African Defence Force (SADF) involvement in Angola, part of the interrelated South African Border War and Namibian War of Independence, started in 1966 when the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) commenced an armed struggle for Namibian independence. SWAPO officials founded an armed wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), which operated from bases in Zambia and rural Ovamboland.^{[6][17]}

With the loss of the Portuguese colonial administration as an ally and the possibility of new regimes sympathetic to SWAPO in Lisbon's former colonies, Pretoria recognised that it would lose a valued *cordon sanitaire* between South West Africa and the Frontline States.^{[17][18][19][20]} PLAN could seek sanctuary in Angola, and South Africa would be faced with another hostile regime and potentially militarised border to cross in pursuit of Namibian guerrillas.

With both the Soviet Union and the United States arming major factions in the Angolan Civil War, the conflict escalated into a major Cold War battleground. South Africa offered advisory and technical assistance to UNITA, while a number of Cuban combat troops entered the country to fight alongside the Marxist MPLA. Moscow also plied its Angolan clients with heavy weapons. American aid to UNITA and the FNLA was initially undertaken with Operation IA Feature, but this was terminated by the Clark Amendment in October 1976. Aid would not yet return until after the repeal of the Clark Amendment in 1985.^[21] China subsequently recalled its military advisers from Zaire, ending its tacit support for the FNLA.^[22]

Cuban instructors began training PLAN in Zambia in April 1975, and the movement had 3,000 new recruits by April. Guerrilla activity intensified, election boycotts were staged in Ovamboland, and the Ovambo Chief Minister assassinated. South Africa responded by calling up more reservists and placing existing security forces along the border on standby. Raids into Angola became commonplace after July 15.^[23]

2.2.1 Support for UNITA and FNLA

Consequently, with the covert assistance of the United States through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), it began assisting UNITA and the FNLA in a bid to ensure that a neutral or friendly government in Luanda prevailed.^[6] On 14 July 1975, South African Prime Minister Balthazar Vorster approved weapons worth US \$14 million to be bought secretly for FNLA and UNITA.^{[24][25]} of which the first shipments from South Africa arrived in August 1975.

2.2.2 Ruacana-Calueque occupation

On 9 August 1975 a 30-man SADF patrol moved some 50 kilometres (31 mi) into southern Angola and occupied the Ruacana-Calueque hydro-electric complex and other installations on the Cunene River.^{[6][26]:39} The scheme was an important strategic asset for Ovamboland, which relied on it for its water supply. The facility had been completed earlier in the year with South African funding.^[27] Several hostile incidences with UNITA and SWAPO frightening foreign workers had provided a rationale for the occupation.^[28] The defence of the facility in southern Angola also was South Africa's justification for the first permanent deployment of regular SADF units inside Angola.^{[29][30]} On 22 August 1975 the SADF initiated operation "Sausage II", a major raid against SWAPO in southern Angola and on 4 September 1975, Vorster authorized the provision of limited military training, advice and logistical assistance. In turn FNLA and UNITA would help the South Africans fight SWAPO.^{[17][31]}

Meanwhile, the MPLA had gained against UNITA in Southern Angola and by mid-October was in control of 12 of Angola's provinces and most cities. UNITA's territory had been shrinking to parts of central Angola,^[32] and it became apparent that UNITA did not have any chance of capturing Luanda by independence day, which neither the United States nor South Africa were willing to accept.^[33]

The SADF established a training camp near Silva Porto (Kuito) and prepared the defences of Nova Lisboa (Huambo). They assembled the mobile attack unit "Foxbat" to stop approaching FAPLA-units with which it clashed on 5 October, thus saving Nova Lisboa for UNITA.^{[6][34]}

2.2.3 Task Force Zulu

On 14 October, the South Africans secretly initiated Operation Savannah when Task Force Zulu, the first of several South African columns, crossed from Namibia into Cuando Cubango. The operation provided for elimination of the MPLA from the southern border area, then from south western Angola, from the central region, and finally for the capture of Luanda.^[35] According to John Stockwell, a former CIA officer, "there was close liaison between the CIA and the South Africans" ^[33] and "'high officials' in Pretoria claimed that their intervention in Angola had been based on an 'understanding' with the United States".^[36] The intervention was also backed by Zaire and Zambia.^[37]

With the liberation forces busy fighting each other, the SADF advanced very quickly. Task Force Foxbat joined the invasion in mid-October.^{[17][38][39]} The territory the MPLA had just gained in the south was quickly lost to the South African advances. After South African advisors and antitank weapons helped to stop an MPLA advance on Nova Lisboa (Huambo) in early October, Zulu captured Rocardas (Xangongo) by 20, Sa da Bandeira (Lubango) by 24 and Mocamedes by 28 October.

With the South Africans moving quickly toward Luanda, the Cubans had to terminate the CIR at Salazar only 3 days after it started operating and deployed most of the instructors and Angolan recruits in Luanda.^[40] On 2–3 November, 51 Cubans from the CIR Benguela and South Africans had their first direct encounter near Catengue, where FAPLA unsuccessfully tried to stop the Zulu advance. This encounter led Zulu-Commander Breytenbach to conclude that his troops had faced the best organized FAPLA opposition to date.^[41]

For the duration of the campaign, Zulu had advanced 3,159 km in thirty-three days and had fought twenty-one battles / skirmishes in addition to sixteen hasty and fourteen deliberate attacks. the Task Force accounted for an estimated 210 MPLA dead, 96 wounded and 50 POWs while it had suffered 5 dead and 41 wounded.^{[6][42]}

2.2.4 Cuban intervention

After the MPLA debacle at Catengue, the Cubans became very aware of the South African intervention. On 4 November Castro decided to begin an intervention on an unprecedented scale: "Operation Carlota". The same day, a first airplane with 100 heavy weapon specialists, which the MPLA had requested in September, left for Brazzaville, arriving in Luanda on 7 November. On November 9 the first 100 men of a contingent of a 652-strong battalion of elite Special Forces were flown in.^[43] The 100 specialists and 88 men of the special forces were dispatched immediately to the nearby front at Kifangondo. They assisted 850 FAPLA, 200 Katangans and one Soviet advisor.

With the help of the Cubans and the Soviet advisor, FAPLA decisively repelled an FNLA-Zairian assault in the Battle of Kifangondo on 8 November.^[44] The South African contingent, 52 men commanded by General Ben de Wet Roos, that had provided for the artillery on the northern front, had to be evacuated by ship on 28 November.^[45] MPLA-leader Agostinho Neto proclaimed independence and the formation of the People's Republic of Angola on 11 November and became its first President.

2.2.5 South African reinforcements

On 6 and 7 November 1975 Zulu captured the harbour cities of Benguela (terminal of the Benguela railroad) and Lobito. The towns and cities captured by the SADF were given to UNITA. In central Angola, at the same time, combat unit Foxbat had moved 800 kilometres (500 mi) north toward Luanda.^[29] By then, the South Africans realised that Luanda could not be captured by independence day on 11 November and the South Africans considered ending the advance and retreating. But on 10 November 1975 Vorster relented to UNITA's urgent request to maintain the military pressure with the objective of capturing as much territory as possible before the impending meeting of the Organization of African Unity.^[46] Thus, Zulu and Foxbat continued north with two new battle groups formed further inland (X-Ray and Orange) and "there was little reason to think the FAPLA would be able to stop this expanded force from capturing Luanda within a week."^[47] Through November and December 1975, the SADF presence in Angola numbered 2,900 to 3,000 personnel.^{[61][48]}

After Luanda was secured against the north and with reinforcements from Cuba arriving, Zulu faced stronger resistance advancing on Novo Redondo (Sumbe). First Cuban reinforcements arrived in Porto Amboim, only a few km north of Novo Redondo, quickly destroying three bridges crossing the Queve river, effectively stopping the South African advance along the coast on 13 November 1975.^[49] Despite concerted efforts to advance north to Novo Redondo, the SADF was unable to break through FAPLA defences.^{[50][51][52]} In a last successful advance a South African task force and UNITA troops captured Luso on the Benguela railway on 11 December which they held until 27 December.^{[61][53]}

2.2.6 End of South African advance

By mid-December South Africa extended military service and brought in reserves.^{[54][55]} "An indication of the seriousness of the situation ... is that one of the most extensive military call-ups in South African history is now taking place".^[56] By late December, the Cubans had deployed 3,500 to 4,000 troops in Angola, of which 1,000 were securing Cabinda,^[57] and eventually the struggle began to favour of the MPLA.^[58] Apart from being "bogged down" on the southern front,^[59] the South African advance halted, "as all attempts by Battle-Groups Orange and X-Ray to extend the war into the interior had been forced to turn back by destroyed bridges".^[60] In addition, South Africa had to deal with two other major setbacks: the international press criticism of the operation and the associated change of US policies. Following the discovery of SADF troops in Angola, most African and Western backers declined to continue to back the South Africans due to the negative publicity of links with the Apartheid government.^[61] The South African leadership felt betrayed with a member of congress saying "When the chips were down there was not a single state prepared to stand with South Africa. Where was America? Where were Zaire, Zambia ... and South Africa's other friends?"^[62]

2.3 Major battles and incidents

2.3.1 Battle of Quifangondo

Main article: [Battle of Quifangondo](#)

On 10 November 1975, the day before Angolan independence, the FNLA attempted against advice to capture Luanda from the MPLA. South African gunners and aircraft assisted the offensive which went horribly wrong for the attackers; they were routed by the FAPLA assisted by Cubans manning superior weaponry that had arrived recently in the country. The South African artillery, antiquated due to the UN embargo, was not any match for the longer-ranged Cuban **BM-21** rocket launchers, and therefore could not influence the result of the battle.

2.3.2 Battle of Ebo

The Cuban military, anticipating a South African advance (under the direction of Lieutenant Christopher du Raan) towards the town of **Ebo**, established positions there at a river crossing to thwart any assault. The defending artillery force, equipped with a **BM-21** battery, a 76mm field gun, and several anti-tank units, subsequently destroyed five to six armoured cars, whilst they were bogged down with RPG-7s, on November 25, killing 5 and wounding 11 South African soldiers. A **Cessna** spotter aircraft was shot down over Ebo the following day. This was the first tangible South African defeat of Operation Savannah.

2.3.3 “Bridge 14”

Following the ambush at Ebo, the South African *Battle Group Foxbat* began attempting to breach the Nhia River at “Bridge 14”, a strategic crossing near the **FAPLA** headquarters north of **Quibala**. This ensuing Battle for Bridge 14 accounted for the many fierce actions fought by withdrawing Cuban and Angolan forces from the river inland to “Top Hat”, a hill overlooking the southern approach to the bridge.^{[6][26]:54[63]} In early December, *Foxbat* had infiltrated the hill with two artillery observers, who directed fire on FAPLA positions from a battery of **BL 5.5-inch Medium Guns**.^[64] This development forced Cuban commander Raúl Arguelles to call off an intended counter-offensive and order a redeployment via Ebo, instructing his units to withdraw from the Nhia. Unfortunately, his subsequent death in a landmine explosion caused much confusion in some sectors of the defence line, with several of the defending units overlooking Bridge 14 as a result of a series of miscommunications. Meanwhile, South African **sappers** started repairing the bridge on December 11 despite heavy FAPLA opposition. By morning the situation had worsened with *Foxbat* advancing in full force.^[65] At about 7 AM, the defending troops came under attack. Heavy artillery pounded the northern banks, wiping out several mortar positions and at least one ammunition truck. The Cubans, supported by **ZPU-4s** and **BM-21 Grads**, covered the main road with **Sagger wire-guided missiles** to deter the South African advance. However, a column of twelve **Eland-90 armoured cars** supported by infantry broke through, skirting the road to confuse the missile teams, who had trained their weapons on the centre of the bridge.^[66]

The Elands swiftly engaged the remaining mortars with high-explosive shells, routing their crews. Twenty Cuban advisers were also dispatched when they attempted to overtake a Lieutenant van Vuuren’s armoured car in the chaos, possibly mistaking it for an Angolan vehicle. Slowing to let the truck pass, van Vuuren promptly slammed a 90mm round into its rear – killing the occupants.^[66]

It was during this engagement that **Danny Roxo** was claimed to have single-handedly killed twelve FAPLA soldiers while conducting a reconnaissance of the bridge, an action for which he was awarded the **Honoris Crux**.^[67] A number of other South African military personnel were also decorated for bravery at Bridge 14, some posthumously. It is estimated that several hundred Cubans lost their lives during the attack; the SADF suffered 4 dead.^{[6][63][65]}

The events at Bridge 14 were subsequently dramatised by South Africa in the 1976 **Afrikaans** film *Brug 14*.

2.3.4 Battle of Luso

On December 10, the South African Task Force X-Ray followed the Benguela railway line from Silva Porto (**Kuito**) east to **Luso**, which they overran on the 10th December 1975.^[68] The South African contingent included an armoured squadron, supporting infantry units, some artillery, engineers, and UNITA irregulars. Their main objective was to seize the Luso airport,^[69] which later went on to serve as a supply point until the South Africans finally departed Angola in early January 1976.

2.3.5 Battles involving Battlegroup Zulu in the west

There were numerous unrecorded clashes fought in the southwest between Colonel Jan Breytenbach's SADF battlegroup and scattered MPLA positions during Operation Savannah. Eventually, Breytenbach's men were able to advance three thousand kilometers over Angolan soil in thirty-three days.

On a related note, Battlegroup Zulu later formed the basis of South Africa's famous 32 Battalion.

2.3.6 Ambrizete incident

The South African Navy was not planned to be involved in the hereunto land operation, but after a failed intervention by the South African Army in the Battle of Quifangondo, nevertheless had to hastily extract a number of army personnel by sea from far behind enemy lines in Angola, as well as abandoned guns. Ambrizete north of Luanda at 7°13'25"S 12°51'24"E / 7.22361°S 12.85667°E was chosen as the pick-up point for the gunners involved in the defeat at Quifangondo. The frigates SAS *President Kruger* and SAS *President Steyn* went to the area, where the latter used inflatable boats and its Westland Wasp helicopter to extract 26 personnel successfully from the beach on 28 November 1975.^{[6][70][71]} The replenishment oiler SAS *Tafelberg* provided logistical support to the frigates, and picked up the guns in Ambriz after they were towed to Zaire, and took them to Walvis Bay.

General Constand Viljoen, who had grave concerns at the time about the safety of both his soldiers and abandoned field guns, called it "the most difficult night ever in my operational career".^[72]

The success of this operation was exceptionally fortuitous, given that the South African Navy had been penetrated by the spy Dieter Gerhardt.

2.4 Aftermath



Memorial plaques in the Voortrekker Monument for four South African servicemen killed during Operation Savannah

South Africa continued to assist UNITA in order to ensure that SWAPO did not establish any bases in southern Angola.^[6]

The 49 South African casualties during the conflict were never acknowledged by the SADF, who were operating covertly in the country. These soldiers were listed simply as 'missing' rather than 'killed in action', resulting in a number of Supreme Court cases afterwards to change their status.

2.5 South African order of battle

Main article: [South African order of battle during Operation Savannah](#)

The South Africans deployed a number of Combat Groups during Operation Savannah – initially, only Combat Groups A and B were deployed, with the remaining groups being mobilised and deployed into Angola later in the campaign. There has been much dispute the overall size of Task Force Zulu. Current evidence indicates that the Task Force started with approximately 500 men and grew to a total of 2,900 with the formation of Battle Groups Foxbat, Orange and X-Ray.^[73]

2.6 Association

The Savannah Association is an association of ex-servicemen of all units who were involved in the operation. They meet annually to commemorate the operation. The insignia of the association is a **Trefoil**.

2.7 Further reading

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Chapter 3

Operation Bruilof

Operation Bruilof (English: **Operation Wedding**) was a planned military operation in 1978 by the South African Defence Force during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War.

3.1 Background

The operation was planned for May 1978, to be conducted by 61 Mechanised Infantry Battalion Group and paratroops.^{[1]:74} This was to be the first mechanised force to be deployed by the South African forces during the war and consisted of the then new Ratel Infantry Fighting Vehicles as well as Eland Armoured Cars.

The plan called for the SADF to cross the South-West Africa-Angola border, with the battle group attacking and destroying six South-West Africa People's Organisation bases around Chetequera before withdrawing.^{[1]:74}

The plan was eventually abandoned and merged into what became Operation Reindeer planned for the 4 May.^{[1]:74}

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Chapter 4

Operation Seiljag

Operation Seiljag (English: **Operation Yacht**) was a military operation by the South African Defence Force during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War.

Taking place in 1978, the operation was conducted by 32 Battalion in the central part of the operational area in order to flush out South-West Africa People's Organisation bases in southern Angola.^[1]

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Chapter 5

Operation Reindeer

This article is about the South African military operation. For other uses of the term, see [Operation Reindeer \(disambiguation\)](#).

Operation Reindeer, which began on 4 May 1978, was South Africa's second major military operation in Angola, the first being [Operation Savannah](#).

The South African operation consisted of an assault by 2 South African Infantry Battalion on two South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) base complexes, [Chetequera](#) and [Dombondola](#), near to the then-South-West Africa/Angola border; an assault by the elite [32 Battalion](#) on SWAPO's Omepepa-Namuidi-Henhombe base complex around 20 km east of Chetequera; and finally, the attack the operation is most known for — a controversial airborne assault by paratroopers on [Cassinga](#), a refugee camp and SWAPO's regional headquarters, 260 km inside Angola. The operation ended on 10 May 1978.

5.1 Background

Prime Minister [John Vorster](#) met his defence advisers in December 1977.^{[1]:71} They discussed the need to take stronger measures against [SWAPO](#), moving from the defensive position of reacting to [PLAN](#) incursions into SWA/Namibia, to one where the SADF would conduct pre-emptive attacks on [PLAN](#) bases in [Angola](#).^{[1]:71} All external operational plans would have to have the approval of the Prime Minister.

Early in 1978, planning begun for [Operation Brulhof](#) which involved a combined mechanised infantry and airborne attack on SWAPO bases around the town of [Chetequera](#), 25km inside Angola.^{[1]:74} These plans were abandoned and were expanded into a new plan called Operation Reindeer. This new operation included plans to attack the Chetequera bases but added the more important objective of attacking the SWAPO headquarters at [Cassinga](#). The date of the operation was set for the 4 May.^{[1]:74}

5.2 Planning

Operation Reindeer planning identified three targets:

5.2.1 Target Alpha “Moscow”

The target was the former [copper](#) mining town of [Cassinga](#) which was about 250km inside Angola. [Cassinga](#) had been converted into a SWAPO forward operational HQ and training base for Southern Angola commanded by Commander [Dimo Hamaambo](#). Intelligence believed that the base contained around 1200 recruits.^{[1]:75} The base was surrounded by zigzag trenches and bunkers. The plan involved three stages, an aerial attack by [SAAF](#) fighter bombers, followed by a parachute drop led by Colonel [Jan Breytenbach](#), and lastly the withdrawal of paratroops by helicopter. The objectives were to destroy the base, capture Commander Dimo Hamaambo,^{[1]:76} destroy supplies and equipment, gather intelligence and take prisoners. The last objective was to free POW Sapper Johan van der Mescht.^{[1]:76}

5.2.2 Target Bravo “Vietnam”

This plan was for the attack by the SADF on six bases at Chetequera which included a SWAPO forward HQ for Western Ovamboland and supply base. Intelligence believed that these bases had a combined total of between 900 and 1000 PLAN insurgents.^{[1]:75} These bases were heavily defended by trenches and bunkers and contained weapons such as recoilless guns, RPG-7, 82mm mortars and 14.5mm AA guns. The plan involved an attack by mechanised Battle Group Juliet of SADF troops of national servicemen and permanent force soldiers commanded by Commandant Frank Bestbier.^{[1]:77} A further two independent combat teams would attack the southern most bases. The plan ended with a withdrawal back over the border.

5.2.3 Target Charlie

The plan involved an attack on the smaller bases and suspected bases east of Chetequera.^{[1]:75} The attack would be carried out by five rifle companies of the 32 Battalion supported by air and artillery units.^{[1]:77} The commander would be Commandant Deon Ferreira.

5.3 SADF Order of Battle



Reindeer marked the combat debut of the Ratel infantry fighting vehicle.

The following SADF units took part on the following targets:

5.3.1 Cassinga

Main article: [Battle of Cassinga](#)

Composite Parachute Battalion

- Made up of elements from 1, 2 and 3 Parachute Battalions

9 Rifle Platoon**11 Rifle Platoon****2 Hawk Groups** from 1 Parachute Battalion**5.3.2 Chetequera and Dombondola****2 South African Infantry Battalion**

- **Combat Group Juliet** (assault on Chetequera)
- **Combat Group Joubert** (assault on Dombondola)
- **Combat Group Serfontein** (assault on Dombondola)

5.3.3 Omepepa-Namuidi-Henhombe**32 Battalion**

- 5 Rifle companies
- 81mm mortar platoon
- 140mm artillery troop
- Helicopter gunships

5.4 Battles**5.4.1 Cassinga**

Main article: [Battle of Cassinga](#)

5.4.2 Chetequera and Dombondola^[2]

The plan called for Combat Team Juliet to attack the Chetequera base from the north while Combat Teams Joubert and Serfontein would cross the border and attack the bases around Dombondola from the south. Juliet crossed the border around 10 am on 4 May in the new **Ratels**. They headed east past Dombondola to assemble north of Chetequera but arrived 90 minutes late due to the condition of the Angolan bush and road tracks. This delayed the air attack by the **SAAF** which began around 13h30 with **Canberra**'s and **Buccaneer**'s bombing the base. Due to radio delays between Combat Team Juliet's **forward air controller**, the attack by ground forces started late giving PLAN time to prepare. Thick bush and maize fields interrupted the effectiveness of the mechanised infantry and individual units found themselves fighting on their own at close quarters in the trenches with rifles and grenades. The initial assault lasted only 11 minutes before all the units were able to reassemble and at which point it was realised that part of the base had been missed. The base was attacked again and by 15:30 pm fighting ceased, with the remaining PLAN forces either killed, surrendered or having escaped into the bush. It was recorded that 248 PLAN member had been killed and 200 captured while CG Juliet lost 2 men and had 10 wounded. Due to the delay in the start of the operation, Juliet spent the night in defensive positions in the Angolan bush and returned to the SWA border the next day.

Due to the heavy fighting at Chetequera, the SADF decided to use artillery to bombard the PLAN bases at Chatu and Dombondola 1 & 2. The two combat groups then crossed the border and headed for their respective targets. Combat Group Joubert headed off late and then got lost, arriving at the base from the wrong direction and used a swing manoeuvre with the assistance of a planned artillery bombardment, which never materialised, to attack the Chatu base. The attack lasted 30 minutes and concluded with its capture and the seizure of weapons. CG Joubert spent the night in defensive positions and returned the next day to SWA by 10 am with CG Juliet.

Combat Group Serfontein was to assist CG Joubert if required. This was not necessary and so attacked its objective of Dombondola 2. The base was found to be deserted and was destroyed and weapons captured. Serfontein was then ready to attack its next objective but the missions were cancelled and the group returned to SWA.

5.4.3 Omepepa-Namuidi-Henhombe^{[3]:129-132}

The operation to attack the smaller SWAPO bases just north of the SWA border began on the morning of 6 May 1978. Three 32 Battalion companies advanced on the first target, with one company protecting the artillery troop while the fifth company was held in reserve. On lining up to attack the first target, artillery fire was called in to soften up the target. Due to an error in the calibration of the artillery pieces, the 32 Battalion units were shelled by their own side resulting in one death and eighteen wounded. The SA forces retreated south of their intended target to evacuate their wounded and the first target was attacked the next day after the artillery troop had moved forward. By the 8 May, SAAF helicopters were added to the attack plan and 32 Battalion troops were airlifted from one target to another with five SWAPO bases attacked that day. On the 9 May, the operation resumed without air support with bases being attacked throughout the day. 10 May was followed by further attacks on bases with several being empty of any enemy forces resulting in some of the 32 Battalion units being returned to the edge of the border. Though the operation officially ended on the 10 May, the last base was attacked in the early morning of the 11 May with all SADF forces back over the border by 10h00.

5.5 Aftermath

On the 25 April, several days before the beginning of Operation Reindeer, the South African government had agreed to the Western nations proposal of a settlement in SWA/Namibia though these proposals had not been accepted by SWAPO.^{[1]:74} At the same time the **UN General Assembly** had begun a 10 day session to discuss South Africa's control of South West Africa and which ended on the day before the raid on the 4 May.^{[1]:75} The Angolan news agency was the first to report a raid on a refugee camp at Cassinga, on the same day it occurred and this made international news that evening.^[4] Because the South African government had failed to break the news of the raid first, it lost the initiative to control the flow of information.^[5] Finally, on the 5 May, the South African government responded to the international news of raid by explaining their reasons to the South African public and in later days had succeeded in convincing them of the importance of conducting the raid.^[6] During that day **Radio Moscow** was reporting a raid on a refugee camp and by that evening a special session of the **UN Security Council** was convened at the request of Angola.^[7] **Sam Nujoma**, SWAPO's leader, addressed the council calling for an full economic, oil and arms embargo of South Africa and resulted in the **United Nations Security Council Resolution 428**.^[8] By the 8 May, SWAPO and its leader Sam Nujoma had left the talks in New York due to a belief that negotiations for a settlement to the SWA/Namibia question would serve no purpose at this stage.^{[1]:80} The US representative to the United Nations would later claim that the Western Nations were a week away from gaining acceptance of their plan and the raid had destroyed those efforts. As to how many people died in the raid and whether there were women and children killed during the raid depends on whose side one wants to listen too. Figures from SWAPO and the Angolan government range from 582 to 624 killed^{[1]:80} in the Cassinga raid with 400 to 611 wounded and described as a mixture of combatants and civilians. The South African government figures ranges as high as 1000 PLAN combatants killed for Operation Reindeer with 200 captured.^{[1]:77} SADF casualties for Operation Reindeer were 7 dead and 39 wounded.

5.6 See also

- Operation Protea
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 428

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Chapter 6

Operation Vanity

Operation Vanity was a Rhodesian military operation in Angola with clandestine assistance from the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the Rhodesian Bush War and South African Border War. The Rhodesian Air Force planned a retaliatory raid against a ZIPRA camp in Angola after a second Air Rhodesia Viscount was shot down on 12 February 1979.^{[1]:157}

6.1 Operation

In retaliation for the downing of a civilian airliner of Air Rhodesia, the Rhodesian Air Force (RhAF) planned a bombing raid against a ZIPRA training camp situated nearby the town of Luso in Angola.^{[1]:157} There was said to be 3000 ZIPRA soldiers based there as well as Cuban and East German advisors.^{[2]:Chp5} The Rhodesians were only able to provide four Canberra bombers for the raid and required three additional aircraft which would be provided clandestinely by the South African Air Force (SAAF).^{[2]:Chp5} Three SAAF Canberra bombers of 12 Squadron, under the command of Major Hannes Bekker, were armed with Alpha bombs and took off around 18h15 from Air Force Base Waterkloof, South Africa on 25 February 1979.^{[2]:Chp5} From there they flew northwards to the Victoria Falls airfield in Rhodesia and landed after dark.^{[2]:Chp5} There the navigators planned the raid for the following morning. The strike leader was Squadron Leader Chris Dixon, 5 Squadron Rhodesian Air Force, call-sign Green Leader.^{[2]:Chp5} Three SAAF and three RhAF were armed with 5 Alpha bombs each while the last Rhodesian Canberra bomber was armed with six 1000lb bombs.^{[2]:Chp5}

All seven bombers took off on 26 February 1979 at 06h30 with the target 600 nautical miles to the north-west.^{[2]:Chp5} Additional aircraft were provided in the form of one Dakota command and control aircraft and two Hawker Hunter fighters.^{[2]:Chp5} Initially command passed to Flight Lieutenant Ted Brent due to radio problems but would return to Chris Dixon later in the flight.^{[2]:Chp5} The flight headed over Zambia and then into Angola, dodging both countries radars, towards the Benguela Railway west of Luso then turned east and followed it toward the town.^{[2]:Chp5[1]:157} By this time they had formed into two formations of four and three bombers, line abreast, hitting a rainstorm which clear up two minutes from the target.^{[2]:Chp5} The bombers, now line-abreast dropped to a height of 300ft so that the Alpha bombs, a type of cluster bomb, would cover an area 300 by 1000 meters.^{[2]:Chp5} As they attacked, rows and rows of bungalows could be seen by the pilots with no anti-aircraft fire received, nor vehicles seen nor anyone on the parade ground, giving the pilots the impression of an empty camp.^{[2]:Chp5}

6.2 Aftermath

Having attacked the target successfully, the bombers returned to Rhodesia, the SAAF bombers to Flyde near Hartley while the RhAF bombers flew back to Victoria Falls with one 1000lb bomb before refueling and joining the SAAF aircraft.^{[2]:Chp5} Photographic evidence captured by a SAAF bomber showed the camp was occupied and there were anti-aircraft guns.^{[2]:Chp5} It was said 160 ZIPRA soldiers died and another 530 wounded.^{[1]:157}

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Chapter 7

Operation Rekstok

Operation Rekstok was a series of South African raids into southern **Angola** on 7 March 1979 during the **South African Border War** and **Angolan Civil War**.^{[1]:86} The operation lasted six days. Operating from **Ovamboland**, SADF forces entered Angola and attacked **SWAPO** bases at Mongua, Oncocua, Henhombe and Heque.^{[1]:86[2]} During the operation, a **SAAF Canberra** bomber was shot down, killing Lieutenant Wally Marais and Second Lieutenant OJ Doyle.^[3] The **SADF** conducted Rekstok concurrently with **Operation Safraan** and later performed **Operation Sceptic**.

7.1 References

- [1] Steenkamp, Willem (1989). *South Africa's border war, 1966-1989*. Gibraltar: Ashanti Pub. ISBN 0620139676.
- [2] Hamann, Hilton (2001). *Days of the Generals*. eBook. Chapter 4.
- [3] Louw, Martin & Bouwer, Stefaan (1995). *The South African Air Force at War*. p. 154

7.2 Further reading

- Hamann, Hilton (2001). *Days of the generals* (1st ed. ed.). Cape Town: Zebra. ISBN 978-1868723409.
- Steenkamp, Willem (1989). *South Africa's border war, 1966-1989*. Gibraltar: Ashanti Pub. ISBN 0620139676.

Chapter 8

Operation Safraan

Operation Safraan was a series of South African Defence Force raids from the Caprivi Strip area during the South African Border War. On August 23, 1978 PLAN and the Zambian army shelled the small South African garrison town Katimo Mulilo in eastern Caprivi (Namibia). In March 1979, South African forces entered south-western Zambia attacking PLAN bases in retaliation for the shelling of Katimo Mulilo.^{[1]:86} These bases were around Sinjembele and the Njinje forest, ^{[2]:Chpt4} were found to have been vacated but the facilities were destroyed disrupting future border infiltrations.^{[1]:86} The raid into Zambia resulted in SWAPO being asked to leave the country.^{[2]:Chpt4} Conducted on 7 March 1979 concurrently with Operation Rekstok; it followed Operation Reindeer and preceded Operation Sceptic. The name means “saffron” in Afrikaans.

8.1 Further reading

- Steenkamp, Willem (1989). *South Africa's border war, 1966-1989*. Gibraltar: Ashanti Pub. ISBN 0620139676.
- Hamann, Hilton (2001). *Days of the generals* (1st ed. ed.). Cape Town: Zebra. ISBN 978-1868723409.
- Nothling, CD (Col.). *Kort Kroniek van Militêre Operasies en Optredes in Suidwes-Afrika en Angola (1914-1988)*. Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies, Vol 19, Nr 2, 1989.

8.2 References

- [1] Steenkamp, Willem (1989). *South Africa's border war, 1966-1989*. Gibraltar: Ashanti Pub. ISBN 0620139676.
- [2] Hamann, Hilton (2007). *Days Of The Generals: The Untold Story of South Africas Apartheid-era Military Generals*. Struik Publishers. ISBN 1868723402.

8.3 See also

- Angolan Civil War

Chapter 9

Operation Klipklop

Operation Klipklop occurred during the **South African Border War** between the **Republic of South Africa** and **SWAPO**. The operation began at first light on the 30 July 1980 when South African forces attacked SWAPO facilities in **Angola**.^{[1]:94} The objective was a **PLAN** logistics base at the town of Chitado, 5 km from the Namibian border and 35 km east of **Ruacana**, with the aim of disrupting motar attacks on the Ruacana hydro-electric scheme.^{[1]:94} Supported by **Alouette III** attack helicopters, 80 men were dropped by helicopters close to the town. Twenty seven defenders, possibly PLAN or MPLA soldiers, died in the attack that followed with the SADF destroying the **MPLA** base in the town on their withdrawal.^{[1]:94} This operation followed **Operation Sceptic** and preceded **Operation Protea**.

9.1 Further reading

- Steenkamp, Willem (1989). *South Africa's border war, 1966-1989*. Gibraltar: Ashanti Pub. ISBN 0620139676.

9.2 References

- [1] Steenkamp, Willem (1989). *South Africa's border war, 1966-1989*. Gibraltar: Ashanti Pub. ISBN 0620139676.

Coordinates: 17°19′22″S 13°55′16″E / 17.3227°S 13.9211°E

Chapter 10

Operation Konyn

Operation Konyn (1981) was a military operation by the South African Defence Force during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War. Operation Konyn was launched on 21 August 1981. The operation preceded Operation Protea with the objective of destroying targets at Cahama and Chibemba in Angola.^{[1]:169} The Angolans had built a series of radar and early warning stations at Cahama, Chibemba, Lubango and Menongue. Attacking the first two target towns would ensure that the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) would not interfere with the South African Air Force operations in support of South African Defence Force (SADF) ground troops taking part Operation Protea against People's Liberation Army of Namibia bases.^[2]

10.1 Background

Planning for the operation began on the 21 August 1981 while SADF ground combat units begun to form up in position for Operation Protea that was to begin on the early morning of 23 August.^{[1]:169} On the morning of the 23 August, SAAF combat aircraft consisting of two Canberra bombers, eight Mirage F-1's and two Buccaneers attacked facilities at Cahama.^{[1]:169} Minutes later a further two Canberra bombers, sixteen Mirage F-1's attacked the radar installations at Chibemba.^{[1]:169} The radar facilities were heavily defended by SA-7s.^{[1]:169}

By the afternoon, five Canberra bombers returned to Cahama and bombed it again and later that evening the Buccaneer's returned and attacked a transport depot north east of this target town.^{[1]:171}

10.2 Aftermath

On 26 August, during Operation Protea, the town of Cahama and Chibemba were again bombed by the SAAF.^{[1]:174} The following day FAPLA engineers arrived at the towns and begun to rebuild the radar installations and upgrade the defensive positions. At the same time a mechanised battalion of PLAN arrived at Cahama, under FAPLA command, to take up a defensive position.

10.3 References

[1] Nortje, Piet (2004). *32 Battalion: The Inside Story of South Africa's Elite Fighting Unit*. Zebra. ISBN 1868729141.

[2] Louw, Martin & Bouwer, Stefaan (1995). *The South African Air Force at War*. p. 174.

10.4 Further reading

- Steenkamp, Willem (1989). *South Africa's border war, 1966-1989*. Gibraltar: Ashanti Pub. ISBN 0620139676.
- Nortje, Piet (2004). *32 Battalion : the inside story of South Africa's elite fighting unit*. Cape Town: Zebra Press. ISBN 1868729141.

- Martin Louw; Stefaan Bouwer (1995). *The South African Air Force at War*. Melville: Chris van Rensburg. ISBN 0868460842.

Chapter 11

Operation Protea

Operation Protea was a military operation during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War in which South African Defence Forces (SADF) destroyed a number of South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) bases in Angola. During the operation, which took place from August 23 to September 4, 1981, up to 5,000 SADF soldiers occupied Cunene province, Angola.^[1]

11.1 Planning

Operation Protea was launched on 23 August 1981. Its objectives were to destroy the SWAPO command and training center at Xangongo and its logistic bases at Xangongo and Ongiva.

Xangongo, located at 16°44'57"S 14°58'28"E / 16.7491°S 14.9745°E was the headquarters of SWAPO's "north-western front" from where it directed SWAPO units operating primarily in the Kaokoland and in western and central Ovamboland. There were also other SWAPO bases, which were used as supply depots and training bases for SWAPO recruits, sited to the south and southeast of the town.

Ongiva, a town located less than fifty kilometers north of the Angola-South-West Africa border at 17°04'06"S 15°43'34"E / 17.0682°S 15.7262°E, was an important SWAPO logistical and personnel centre which supported operations in central and eastern Ovamboland and in the Kavangoland.

Both Xangongo and Ongiva were key bases in supporting SWAPO's war effort in South-West Africa, because of their location close to its border. Their destruction would undermine SWAPO's ability to conduct operations in their "north-western front" and also have a psychological impact by reinforcing the message of Operation Reindeer to SWAPO that it no longer had the luxury of sanctuaries in southern Angola.

11.2 Order of Battle.^{[2]:169[3][4]:Chp7[5]:123}

11.2.1 South African forces

Brigadier Rudolf Badenhorst – Overall Commander

Task Force Alpha

Colonel Joop Joubert – TF Commander

Battle Group 10 – Commandant Roland de Vries

- one Mechanised infantry company - 61 Mechanised Battalion
- one Parachute company
- one Armoured car squadron



FAPLA T-34-85, likely one of several captured during Protea. Several others were destroyed by Eland 90 or Ratel 90 armoured cars.

- one Mortar platoon
- one 140mm artillery troop
- one combat engineer troop

Battle Group 20 – Commandant Johan Dippenaar

- one mechanised infantry company
- two motorised infantry companies
- one armoured car squadron - two Ratel-90 troops and two Eland-90 troops
- one medium artillery troop
- one 81mm mortar platoon
- one field engineer troop
- one assault pioneer platoon
- two Protection platoons

Battle Group 30 – Commandant Chris Serfontein

- three motorised infantry companies - National service units
- one armoured car squadron - Eland-90

- 120m mortar battery - 43 Light Battery
- 81mm mortar platoon
- Field engineer troop
- two protection platoons

Battle Group 40 – Commandant Deon Ferreira

- three motorised infantry companies – 32 Battalion
- one armoured car squadron - Eland-90
- 120mm mortar battery - 41 Light Battery
- four anti-tank teams
- two protection platoons - 1 Platoon from B company of 202 Battalion and 1 other platoon

Combat Team Mamba (Mobile Reserve) – Commandant Johnny Coetzer

- one mechanised company – 61 Mechanised
- one anti-tank platoon - Ratel-90 – 61 Mechanised
- two Ratel 60 sections
- 140mm G-2 artillery troop - 1 Medium Battery (4 Field Regiment)

Task Force Bravo

Colonel Vos Benade – TF Commander

Battle Group 50 - Commandant Frans Botes

- four motorised companies - 201 Battalion
- 81mm Mortar platoon

Battle Group 60 - Commandant James Hills

- three motorised infantry companies - 32 Battalion
- one 81mm Mortar platoon

Mobile Reserve - Commandant Johnnie Coetzer

- 1 Parachute Battalion - two companies and one pathfinder platoon
- 52 Reconnaissance Regiment - one special forces team

Battle Group 30

- detached from TF Alpha

Battle Group 40

- detached from TF Alpha

11.2.2 Angolan forces

11 Brigade based at Ongiva and is the district headquarters

- two infantry battalions
- two anti-aircraft battalions – 23mm guns
- one tank company – T-34
- one armoured-car company – BTR-23
- one artillery battery – 82mm and 76mm guns

19 Brigade based at Xangongo with elements at Humbe and Peu Peu

- two infantry companies
- one tank company – T-34
- one armoured car squadron – BTR-23
- one artillery battery
- three 122mm rocket launchers
- seven anti-aircraft guns

21 Brigade

- based at Cahama

11.2.3 Soviet military advisors

- based at Xangongo and Ongiva

11.2.4 SWAPO forces

- Xangongo - 500 SWAPO regulars and 500 semi-regulars
- Between Cahama and Humbe - one SWAPO battalion
- Ongiva - SWAPO headquarters

11.3 Battles - Task Force Alpha

On 23 August, the SADF units left the bases and headed towards the Angolan border. On the night of the 23 August, Battle Group 10 would cross at Ruacana while Battle Groups 20, 30 and 40 would cross at Ombalantu.^{[5]:129} A South African special forces team was placed in position to begin monitoring the Cahama/Xangongo highway for any enemy reinforcements.^{[2]:171} The same day the SADF left their bases, the South African Air Force (SAAF) launched a strike with various aircraft against air-defence targets in Angola at Cahama and Chibemba.^{[5]:129[6]:Chp7} This was called Operation Konyn.

11.3.1 Humbe

Battle Group 10 crossed into Angola at Ruacana just before midnight on 23 August and headed northwards through dense bush to their forming point that was 12 km north-west of Humbe.^{[7]:437} They arrive at their form-up point on time even after their progress was slowed after encountering obstacles not shown on their maps.^{[7]:443} At this point they found that H-Hour had been moved back one hour to 11h30 due to the eastern battle groups of Task Force Alpha encountering navigation problems on their march to Xangongo.^{[7]:442} Commandant de Vries divided his force into two combat teams, one of Ratel-20's, Ratel-90's and 81mm mortars in the attack group and the second team as a mobile reserve of Buffels and Eland-90's, with the 140 mm artillery in the rear.^{[7]:446} As Battle Group 10 followed the road south-east to Humbe, the SAAF began to bomb the town of Xangongo. The group's artillery began firing 140 mm artillery rounds at Humbe but was informed by their aerial spotter plane that the trenches close to the town seem abandoned and nor was there any enemy to the battle group's rear in the direction of Cahama. The artillery fire was ceased and their alternative target at Techulu, that was closer, was then taken without incident as FAPLA soldiers fled on seeing the battle group arrive, leaving behind a group of Irish Catholic nuns at the mission station in the village.^{[7]:449-50} By 12h30 the group was heading back towards Humbe passing by the empty trenches and sighting no fleeing enemy from Xangongo, entered the empty town of Humbe.^{[7]:451} They soon left the town and positioned themselves within 3 km of the bridge over the Cunene River and Xangongo. The two combat teams of Ratel-20's and paratroopers were then sent closer to the river and begun to encounter contact with FAPLA troops fleeing Xangongo.^{[7]:452} By dusk the river plain was under the battle groups control and they laagered there overnight though sporadic fire could be heard overnight from Xangongo.^{[7]:456} Apart from being woken and called to arms when a FAPLA column attempted a breakout from Xangongo via the bridge, this was taken care of by the other battle groups and they were stood down and rest of the night was peaceful for Battle Group 10.^{[7]:459} On the 25 August, after gathering up enemy equipment on the river plain, Battle Group 10 crossed the bridge over the Cunene river and by 09h00 they were in Xangongo.^{[7]:460} Their mission would be to hold the town, protect the task force from FAPLA to the north-west while the other battle groups pursued their objectives in the south-east.

11.3.2 Xangongo

Battle Group 20, 30 and 40 crossed the border at Ombalantu into Angola just before midnight on 23 August and headed northwards through dense bush.^{[5]:129} Battle Group 40 led the way followed by 20 and 30 but was slower moving and the other groups who could not overtake to increase the pace towards the forming point.^{[5]:129} This was due to the fact the Buffel troop carriers were slower than the Ratel's.^{[2]:171} By 09h15 on 24 August, these battle groups found themselves to far east due to a navigation error and lost time.^{[5]:129} After correcting their error, the air attack on Xangongo was pushed back by one hour to 12h00.^{[5]:129} The three battle groups would find their way to their forming-up point west of the town and waited for the air and artillery attack. The air attack on Xangongo began at 11h50 when four **Buccaneers** from **24 Squadron** attacked installations and anti-aircraft sites with **AS-30** missiles, one hitting a barracks while the other three failed to hit the targets due to malfunctions.^{[6]:Ch7} At 11h54, five **Canberra** bombers (**12 Squadron**) dropped bombs, followed by dive bombing by three further waves of 8 **Mirage F-1AZ's** (**1 Squadron**), 6 **Mirage F-1CZ's** (**3 Squadron**) and 4 **Mirage IIICZ's** (**2 Squadron**).^{[6]:Chp7} The last wave of rocketing was carried out by eight **Impala's** finishing at 12h10.^{[6]:Chp7} Then followed a twenty minute artillery barrage of the of town's defensive positions by G-2 guns and Valkiri multiple rocket launchers.^{[2]:171}

Battle Group 40 was tasked with taking the town of Xangongo, its defenses and the bridge over the Cunene. The plan was to attack from two place, the north-east with Combat Team 41 and the south-east with Combat Team 42 and this begun around 12h50.^{[2]:171} The teams began to assault the layers of trenches and bunkers that made up the towns defenses.^{[5]:130} The fort and water tower, key targets in the town, were eventually reached and taken. The bridge was reached by the combat teams by 17h30 and was immediately prepared with demolition charges by the engineers.^{[4]:Chp7} It was found later that FAPLA and PLAN officer and their Soviet advisors had hurriedly fled the town while the FAPLA and SWAPO soldiers held their positions and fought furiously.^{[5]:133} Battle Group 40 task with mopping up in Xangongo was completed on the 25 August and would now be attached to Task Force Bravo which was operating to the east against PLAN bases, setting out for the town of Evale after the 26 August.^{[2]:174}

Battle Group 20 was tasked with the southern end of the town and its airfield to the west.^{[2]:171} The first trenches reached by the battle group around 13h25 were found to be empty but as they advanced further, they begun to receive small arms fire and then more serious fire from 23mm anti-aircraft guns.^{[5]:130} Battle Group 20's attack on southern Xangongo was now held up by **ZU-23-2** AA guns and the advance was halted as air strikes were called. Two attacks by **Mirage** aircraft an hour later failed to destroy the site and a third attack by artillery was not successful either.^{[5]:130} Captain Laubscher, flying an observation aircraft, had fired smoke rockets to narrow the **Mirages'** attack, but failed so he decided to attempt a direct hit with smoke rockets to accurately mark the target for the **Mirages**.^{[5]:132} He dive

bombed the target firing one smoke rocket directly into the gun position but by this time the Mirages were out of ordnance and fuel.^{[5]:132} It was later found that his smoke rocket had hit the operator of the gun.^{[5]:132} Captain Danie Laubscher of 42 Squadron was awarded the **Honoris Crux** decoration for bravery.^[8] Two and a half hours later the ground attack had resumed this time with limited enemy ZU-23-2 fire, attacking bunkers and trenches and eventually took the airfield.^{[5]:133} By 18h00, Battle Group 20 was in control of its objectives, having destroyed at least four tanks and capturing vehicles, guns and ammunition.^{[2]:171} Battle Group 20's rest overnight was disturbed by an enemy truck column that advanced from the south into the groups positions and would be destroyed by Ratel 90's and by the midday on 25 August, the battle group was in control of all positions south of the town but lost one soldier in the process.^{[5]:134} Later Battle Group 20 would attack a PLAN base to the south of Xangongo towards Cuamato but was found to be abandoned except for equipment.^{[2]:174}

On the 25 August, after gathering up enemy equipment on the river plain, Battle Group 10 crossed the bridge over the Cunene river and by 09h00 they were inside Xangongo.^{[7]:460} Now based at Xangongo, Battle Group 10 was allocated to protect Task Force Alpha from a FAPLA counterattack from Cahama towards Xangongo.^{[7]:468} It was also tasked with protecting the bridge and ensuring it was ready for demolition when required.^{[7]:468} The paratroopers attached to this battle group were sent to seek out PLAN positions further north of Xangongo but all the bases were found to be abandoned.^{[7]:463}^{[5]:135} Meanwhile the pathfinder group which had been operating around Peu-Peu were attached to the battle group.^{[7]:464} Combat Team 3 was commanded by Major Joe Weyers and would position itself close to **Chicuse** about 18 km south-east from Cahama on the 25 August. If contact with FAPLA took place, then the plan was to stop FAPLA's movement or fight a delaying action back to Xangongo.^{[7]:469} The combat team would consist of three armoured car troops of Ratel and Eland 90's, platoon Ratel-60's, one Ratel-20 Mechanised infantry platoon, troop of 4 G-2 artillery pieces, engineer section, an unmanned aerial vehicle and 44 **Parachute Brigade's** pathfinder group with Colonel **Jan Breytenbach**.^{[7]:468} The combat team advanced north-westwards and took up positions across the Cahama/Xangongo highway with the pathfinders in the flanks to the south and guns in the rear.^{[7]:470}

Around 22h20, the artillery troop reported eight enemy vehicles heading for the combat team's rear from the south-east. The enemy artillery unit, consisting of a BTR-152 APC, **BM-21** MRL's and 23 mm AA guns, passed into the combat teams laager and were ambushed and destroyed with the SADF taking three wounded and capturing two BM-21's.^{[7]:471-2} Mopping up continued on the morning of 26 August but around sunrise, the team were by FAPLA 122 mm rockets that failed to hit their position.^{[7]:472} On the 27 August, Combat Team 3 was recalled to Xangongo and then sent westwards of the town as a stopper group close to Catequero.^{[7]:473}

Two troops of Ratel-90's were later withdrawn from Combat Team 3 the same day and attached to Combat Team 2 and sent towards Ongiva via Mongua as a reserve and joined up with Battle Group 30 around 13h00.^{[7]:482} Combat Team 2 would return to Xangongo from Ongiva by 16h00 on the 28 August.^{[7]:485} On the 29 August, Combat Team 2, replaced Combat Team 3 as the stopper group and the former returned to Xangongo for rest.^{[7]:487} Later that day Combat Team 2 would be recalled too, as Battle Group 10 had received orders to return to SWA/Namibia on 1 September and preparations were required to return with the captured enemy equipment.^{[7]:487} On the same day Combat Team Mamba disbanded and their units rejoined Battle Group 10 and became the stopper group until the 31 August.^{[7]:487-88} Combat Team 3 escorted an artillery group to a position north-west of Mucupe on the 30 August.^{[7]:488} The artillery group fired on Cahama but on their return to Xangongo, they discovered an FAPLA battle group close to Mucupe and after the combat team received reinforcements from their battle group, they attacked only to find the FAPLA forces had retreated to Cahama.^{[7]:488} On the 31 August, Xangongo and its bridge was handed over to UNITA and their SADF military intelligence liaison Commandant Mo Oelschig and headed for Ongiva via Mongua collecting the remains of the Alouette that had been shot down 25 August.^{[7]:500} After spending the night at Ongiva, the underground fuel tanks at the airfield were destroyed and by the 1 September, Battle Group 10 was back at base in South-West Africa/Namibia.^{[7]:501}

11.3.3 Peu-Peu

On 24 August, at 11h05, anti-aircraft sites at Peu-Peu were attacked by four SAAF Impala's using rockets.^{[6]:Chp7} By 11h45, attacks were continued by four Buccaneers who fired four AS-30 with only three striking a barracks.^{[6]:Chp7} Battle Group 30 advanced to a position north-east of Xangongo and found that the FAPLA troops, tanks and artillery at Peu-Peu were preparing to support their troops in Xangongo.^{[5]:133} The South African battle group attacked first and after a short fight forced FAPLA to flee the town destroying tanks, artillery and personnel carriers.^{[5]:133} Unable to mop-up in the town as night fell and with reports of enemy to the west, it would be captured by the South Africans the following morning.^{[2]:171} FAPLA left behind up to 300 tons of ammunition, 120000 litres of diesel and 90000 litres of petrol.^{[5]:133} Battle Group 30 would then release a combat team to back up Battle Group 20 who had thrown in their reserve in Xangongo.^{[5]:133} Battle Group 30 was back in Xangongo on 26 August and joined Battle Group 20

for the advance to positions north of Ongiva and the attack planned for the 27 August.

11.3.4 Mongua

Combat Team Mamba was tasked with taking the village of Mongua east of Xangongo on the 25 August.^{[7]:480} This was a precursor to an attack on Ongiva on 27 August by Battle Group's 20 and 30. FAPLA maintained a mechanised force including tanks around the village and whose size had been underestimated.^{[7]:480[5]:136} The combat team attacked first with **Valkiri** rockets but soon encountered the enemy trenches, 14.5mm anti-aircraft guns and 76mm artillery that held up the infantry attack and so Ratel 90's and Ratel 60 mortar teams were deployed to silence the guns.^{[5]:136-7} The infantry was then released to attack and clear the trenches.^{[5]:133} The teams Ratel 20's and 90's soon overran the village destroying several T-34 tanks and forcing FAPLA to flee towards Ongiva.^{[7]:480[5]:138} The SAAF lost two men when their Alouette III helicopter was shot down by 14.5mm anti-aircraft guns while providing fire support for the combat team.^{[5]:137} Combat Team Mamba would now wait until the following day to be joined by the two battle groups for the attack on Ongiva.

11.3.5 Ongiva

On the 27 August, Battle Group 20 was tasked with the attack on the airfield at Ongiva while Battle Group 30 was tasked to attack the town itself. Battle Group 20 and 30 departed Xangongo on 26 August, leaving the town under control of Battle Group 10, and followed the road east to Mongua.^{[7]:480} There Combat Team Mamba, who had taken the town the day before, joined them and would act as the two battle group's reserve during the attack on Ongiva.^{[7]:481} They then headed south-east to their assembly point north of Ongiva in preparation for the attack at 07h00 on 27 August.^{[7]:481} The SAAF had made a pamphlet drop on the town warning civilians and FAPLA to leave as the South African's fight was with PLAN, but 11 Brigade was instructed to stay and defend.^{[7]:481} PLAN were ordered to strike the SADF in the rear but appeared to take no part in the battle during the following days.^{[5]:139}

The SAAF would open the attack on the morning of 27 August with the first rocket attack by two Mirage III's against anti-aircraft positions north of the runway at Ongiva.^{[6]:Chp7} One of these Mirages was struck by a **SA-7** missile but made it back to its base in SWA/Namibia with serious tail damage.^{[6]:Chp7} The second rocket attack at 07h45 by four Mirage F-1AZ's on anti-aircraft positions close to the airport also drew anti-aircraft fire, SA-7's and **57 mm** guns without any hits.^{[6]:Chp7} A third rocket attack at 07h48 by four Mirage III's hit targets close to the town. The fourth rocket attack at 07h52 by four Mirage III's hit targets close to the town drawing anti-aircraft fire and SA-7's with no hits.^{[6]:Chp7} 08h00 saw another attack this time by five pairs of Canberra and Buccaneer bombers dropping bombs north of the town but on the wrong target but seemed to silence some anti-aircraft positions.^{[6]:Chp7} Six Mirage F-1AZ's drop air burst bombs on the airfield at 08h10 and the last attack at 08h15 was on 11 Brigade headquarters by six Mirage F-1AZ's air bursting bombs.^{[6]:Chp7}

After bombarding the targets with artillery fire, Battle Group 20 set off for targets in and around the airfield.^{[5]:139} Battle Group 20 was divided into four combat teams. Combat Team 50 was the reserve, while Combat Team 10 hit targets south of the airfield, Combat Team 20 attacked targets south-east of the airfield and the last team 30 directly at the airfield and its installations.^{[5]:139} Combat Team 10 encountered 23mm anti-aircraft gun at its target and cleared them with artillery and infantry attacks.^{[5]:139} A counterattack by at least three **T-34**'s was beaten off by Ratel-90's with two tanks destroyed.^{[5]:139} FAPLA then fled their positions.^{[5]:139} Combat Team 20 took the enemy positions by 15h30 but was slowed by 23mm anti-aircraft guns and RPG-7s but mortars and infantry cleared the positions.^{[5]:140} Combat Team 30 attacked the airfield from the south-east and east-west along the runway.^{[5]:140} The team met fierce fighting from FAPLA infantry and anti-aircraft guns and all movement forward by the SADF was held up for two hours despite artillery fire but the use of mortar fire against a water tower helped stop the guns receiving information on the South African positions and the airfield was taken around 14h00 with FAPLA fleeing.^{[5]:140} With Battle Group 20's control of the airfield, it secured Battle Group 30's flank for its attack on the positions in and around the town of Ongiva.^{[5]:141}

Battle Group 30 began its attack on the town defense's but their advance was slowed by minefields and heavy resistance.^{[5]:141} Reports came in of the sighting of T-34 tanks from the east.^{[5]:141} The commander summoned additional anti-tank armour and Battle Group 10 detached Combat Team 2's Ratel-90 troops and were hastily sent to Ongiva arriving around 13h00.^{[7]:482} In the mean time they attempted to slow their advance by attacking them with 120 mm mortars that had had no effect in slowing them down.^{[5]:141} Combat Team 2 went into action immediately but by the time action commenced, dusk was falling and they fired only to discourage the tanks advance.^{[5]:141} As night fell, all that could be seen was the flashes from the tanks and when all the Ratel's fired on the position, succeeded in

destroying two tanks and ending further enemy attacks.^{[5]:141} Battle Group 30 then pulled back and laagered for the night readying themselves for an attack the next day.^{[5]:141} On 28 August, Battle Group 30 resumed their attack on Ongiva only to find the FAPLA defenses, equipment and town abandoned.^{[5]:141} By 12h08, Ongiva was under South African control^{[2]:175}

Also on the morning of 28 August, a FAPLA convoy was discovered fleeing northwards from Ongiva towards Anchanca by a company from 32 Battalion who were attached to Battle Group 60.^{[2]:175} It called in a SAAF airstrike of Mirage's and Impala's that attacked the convoy followed by an attack by Alouette gunships.^{[5]:142} They succeeded in destroying tanks, trucks and armored personnel carriers.^{[5]:142} As the 32 Battalion company moved into to mop up, they discovered the bodies of four Russians, two Soviet officers and two civilian women.^{[5]:142} One soviet soldier Warrant Officer Nikolai Feodorovich Pestretsov was captured when he remained behind with his wife's body.^{[5]:142} It was later discovered that thirteen Soviet military advisors had died that day.^{[5]:142}

Battle Group 20 would begin to garrison the town, but with civilians beginning to ransack it later on the 28 August, by the 29 August they attempted to restore order by distributing captured food and clothing and tried to help restore utilities to the town with the help of the remaining civil servants.^{[5]:149} 30 August saw Battle Group 20 begin to prepare the captured equipment for its return to SWA/Namibia while other elements of the battle group patrolled the road from Ongiva through Namacunda to Santa Clara clearing it of mines as this would be the route the battle groups would leave Angola.^{[2]:175} By 31 August, Battle Group 30 was detached from Task Force Alpha and was attached to Task Force Bravo, who were conducting operations against PLAN bases to the north-east of Ongiva, and sent to the town of Anhanca.

11.4 Aftermath

By the 2 September all units were back in SWA/Namibia and Battle Group 10 resumed being called 61 Mechanised Infantry Battalion while the other battle groups disbanded.^{[5]:142} The Soviets casualties stood at thirteen, nine officers and four civilians while one soldier was captured.^{[5]:142} South African casualties included 10 dead and 64 wounded.^{[5]:143} PLAN and FAPLA casualties were high with 831 dead and 25 captured.^{[5]:143}

The following equipment, said to be between 3000 and 4000 tons, was captured:^{[5]:143}

- 6-9 T-34 tanks
- 3-4 PT-76 tanks
- 4 BRDM-2 APC
- 2 BM-21 MRL
- 25-43 ZIS-3 76 mm guns
- 16 ZU-23 AA guns
- 17 14.5 mm AA guns
- 13 M-55 20 mm AA guns
- 94-97 SA-7
- 240 trucks
- 1800 small arms
- 250 tons ammunition
- 490 000 lt petrol
- 120 000 lt diesel

The end of Operation Protea did not signal the end the South African activity against SWAPO in southern Angola as Operation Protea was quickly followed up by another attack, *Operation Daisy*.

11.5 References

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Chapter 12

Operation Kerslig

Operation Kerslig (aka Candle Light) was a South African Defence Force **special forces** raid on an oil refinery outside **Luanda, Angola**. The raid took place on 30 November 1981 by members of the 1 Reconnaissance Regiment.

12.1 Background

The Petrangol refinery was built in 1958 and supplied Angola with petrol, diesel, and jet fuel. The refinery was attacked around 1am on 30 November, with damage sustained to fuel tanks and pipelines while the refinery complex itself incurred no damage.^[1] Angolan and western oil officials claimed that if the attack had been successful, the city of Luanda would have taken damage from the explosion and the release of poison chemicals.^[1] **Jonas Savimbi**, leader of **UNITA**, initially claimed responsibility for the attack by a small assault team firing RPG's.^[2] By the 1 December, Angolan officials presented evidence to Western diplomats that the attack had been carried out by South African “mercenaries”. It appears that a SADF special forces member, Captain AJP de Kock, was killed when demolition explosives he was laying, prematurely exploded.^[3] This ended the operation, with the special forces team fleeing without the objective being completed.^[1] His remains, the mines, weapons and other sabotage equipment that was left behind were presented to the world's media.^[1]

12.2 Aftermath

The Belgium operator of the refinery reckoned the damage to the refinery would be repaired in two months.^[1] Kundi Paiama, Angola's Minister of State Security was demoted after the raid due to security lapses.^[4] The raid was acknowledged as a South African special forces operation during the final report of the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission**.^[5]

12.3 References

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Chapter 13

Operation Super

Operation Super was a military confrontation during the **South African Border War** and **Angolan Civil War** in March 1982 to prevent **SWAPO** guerrillas infiltrating into **South West Africa** through the **Kaokoveld**^{[1]:101} from a location near the abandoned Portuguese town of Iona in the **Angolan** province of **Namibe**.

13.1 Order of Battle^{[2]:159}

13.1.1 South African forces

- 10 men - 5 Reconnaissance Regiment
- several platoon elements - 32 Battalion
- 2 **Alouette III** gunships and **Puma** transport helicopters

13.1.2 PLAN forces

- over 230 men

13.2 Battles

13.2.1 Initial contact

On 9 March 1982, ten **SADF South African Special Forces Brigade** soldiers (“Recces”) dressed in **PLAN** uniforms launched a reconnaissance mission near Iona, based on intelligence they had gathered about **SWAPO** operations in the area.^{[2]:159} A standby force consisting of a platoon from **32 Battalion** and two **Alouette** gunships ready to react when required.^{[2]:159} The Recces, who were inserted by helicopter, quickly determined that there was considerable **PLAN** vehicle traffic in the area. After planting a **TM 62** anti-tank **landmine** in the road, they withdrew to high ground to observe what unfolded.^{[2]:159} Later in the day, 10 March, six **PLAN** trucks entered the valley, with one of them detonating the mine.^{[3]:181} The mine left the vehicle stranded, whose occupants simply transferred to the other vehicles before driving off, two heading south and three returned northward.^{[3]:182}

A while later a patrol of 28 **PLAN** soldiers arrived on the scene on foot and started looking for evidence of the attackers.^{[2]:159} They eventually found the tracks of the Recces, and started following them. The Recces, realizing that their position was now compromised, immediately called for re-enforcements from **32 Battalion** who were assigned to cover them.

Meanwhile, the Recces were running out of time while they waited for the re-enforcements to arrive. In a desperate attempt to stall for time, they tried to pass themselves off as **PLAN** soldiers as soon as the **PLAN** patrol was within earshot, accusing the **PLAN** patrol of being members of **UNITA**. A fierce argument between the parties ensued, but ended abruptly when the Recce commander shot the **PLAN** commander. A heated firefight erupted, that was joined

at this time by 32 Battalion and an Alouette helicopter gunship fitted with 20 mm cannon.^{[2]:159} When the fighting finally stopped, 21 PLAN soldiers had been killed, seven captured and one escaped.^{[2]:159}

Interrogation of the PLAN prisoners captured during this action revealed the presence of a previously unknown camp nearby in the Cambêno Valley at 16°56'29"S 12°36'32"E / 16.9413°S 12.6088°E, so a plan was immediately formulated to attack it.

13.2.2 Camp assault

A helicopter-borne assault involving 40 members of 32 Battalion was launched on the 12 March, however the attack had to be aborted at the last minute to due thunderstorm activity that limited visibility.^{[2]:160} It was feared that any further attempt to attack the camp would be futile, as the helicopters had been close enough to be heard. However scouts positioned around the area reported no movement out the valley, so a second attack was launched at dawn the following day, 13 March.^{[2]:160}

The helicopters initially struggled to find the well-camouflaged camp, until they were virtually on top of it. At this point the enemy, realizing they had been spotted, started firing at the helicopters with everything they had.^{[2]:160} The 32 Battalion assault force was immediately dropped, only 50m from the camp where the intense fire was coming from. The assault force consisted of two platoons and a 81mm mortar section.^{[2]:160}

The guerrillas had built their camp in the bottom of the valley flanked by high ground on either side.,^{[2]:160} a factor that played strongly against them in the ensuing 18-hour battle. Alouette helicopter gunships used their 20mm cannon to great effect, but were fired upon in turn with RPG rockets and at least 4 SAM-7 missiles (the latter not arming due to helicopters being too close).^{[2]:160} The battle was fought throughout the rocky ravine supported by mortar fire. The battle lasted over seven hours by which time the soldiers of 32 Battalion resorted to using enemy weapons as they began to run out of ammunition.^{[3]:183} As evening fell the 32 Battalion company readied itself for a PLAN counterattack.

13.3 Aftermath

By the next morning, 14 March, a further 24 SADF soldiers were flown in but no counterattack by PLAN occurred.^{[2]:161} and battlefield was found to be littered with dead. 197 insurgents and 3 members of 32 Battalion died, with seven to eight prisoners captured.^{[2]:161} Significant quantities of food, weapons and logistical equipment were captured by the South Africans.^{[2]:161} From information gathered from interrogation of the prisoners, a search over three weeks was made for a further PLAN base consisting of 50 soldiers.^{[3]:184} This search, carried out by a company from 32 Battalion, failed to find the base which was supposedly south of Iona.

Coordinates: 16°53'25"S 12°34'21"E / 16.8902°S 12.5724°E

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Chapter 14

Operation Meebos

Operation Meebos occurred during July and August 1982 with the objective of attacking SWAPO's People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) bases and new regional headquarters in Southern Angola by the South African Defence Force (SADF) based in South West Africa/Namibia. The plan involved the use of South African Air Force helicopters flown from mobile helicopter administrative areas (HAA) with a SADF Tactical Headquarters based deep in Angola and protected from possible People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) attacks by 61 Mechanised Battalion. These helicopters would fly 32 Battalion and paratroopers from the HAA areas to SWAPO targets identified by reconnaissance teams deep in the Angolan bush and by signal and human intelligence.

14.1 Background

Planning for Operation Meebos began when the SADF feared that PLAN and FAPLA would attempt to retake the Angolan towns of Xangongo and Ongiva. These towns had been captured by the SADF during Operation Protea and had been occupied ever since. Ongiva contained a SADF tactical and logistical headquarters with an airfield to support ground and airborne operations to conduct counter-insurgency operations in Southern Angola. The second part of the operation involved identifying the SWAPO bases and headquarters which appeared to be constantly on the move. The plan called for 61 Mechanised Battalion to protect the mobile Advance airfields from possible FAPLA and SWAPO attacks while the SAAF helicopters would transport 32 Battalion and 1 Parachute Battalion companies to attack SWAPO bases identified by reconnaissance teams. The operation began on the 13 July 1982 and was wound down by the 25 August 1982.

14.2 Order of Battle

14.2.1 South African Forces

- Two companies of 32 Battalion
- One company of 1 Parachute Battalion
- 61 Mechanised Battalion Group
- Various SAAF units of combat aircraft and helicopters

14.2.2 SWAPO forces

- Various units based around Evale, Ionde, Mupa and other targets
- Alpha Battalion
- Bravo Battalion

14.2.3 Angolan forces

- 11th FAPLA Brigade based at Cuvelai and Techamutete

14.3 Battle

On the 13 July, one company of 61 Mechanised Battalion moved from Ongiva up to Xangongo. By the 18 July a further two companies and the headquarters of 61 Mech moved into Xangongo where combat readiness training was begun, practising for the forthcoming operation. SAAF Mirages attacked the FAPLA air defences at Cahama around the 21 July. On the 22 July, SADF reconnaissance units had discovered a possible SWAPO headquarters near **Mupa**. It was attacked firstly by **Alouette** gunships followed by an airdrop by helicopter of ground troops which killed around 18 PLAN soldiers but the base was found to have been evacuated. 61 Mechanised Battalions mortar and gun batteries were moved up to Xangongo on the 24 July.

At last 61 Mechanised had completed its combat readiness training around Xangongo and departed there on 27 July heading in the direction of **Mongua** hoping to confuse FAPLA and PLAN intelligence as to its final destination before disappearing off into the Angolan bush. Finally after three days of pushing through the bush, 61 Mech met up with two companies of 32 Battalion by the 30 July, 25 km east of Mupa. There they found what they thought was a suitable site for a HAA position. On the same day, 32 Battalion reconnaissance units had discovered a PLAN base close to the Calonga River, 21 km on the western side of the **Cuvelai/Techamatette** road and about 31 km south-west of Techamutete. Plan was developed for a parachute drop at first light on 31 July, north of the target and a helicopter drop of 32 Battalion at three other points with protection provided by Alouette gunships.

The 31 July did not start well as the vicinity of the HAA was attacked by FAPLA artillery. The FAPLA unit expended its artillery shells in the attack and the HAA had to be moved. The tactical headquarters was moved up to the new HAA from Ongiva. At the same time the 32 Battalion reconnaissance units could not find a suitable drop zone and also noticed the base was being evacuated. The airdrop was cancelled and the paratroopers were called back to their base in **SWA/Namibia**. The plan was modified and the paratroopers were collected and joined 32 Battalion for a very delayed helicopter drop. By the time the SADF arrived at the target all that could be found were PLAN stragglers. It must be noted that the SAAF insistence that their helicopters not remain at the HAA sites overnight would continue to negatively influence the operation in the future due to the distance between the HAA and SAAF bases in **SWA/Namibia**.

1 August began with the HAA being moved further north and a few days earlier aerial intelligence had discovered a base close by. The Tactical headquarters at the HAA began planning another mission consisting of an air attack by **Mirage's** followed by a helicopter troop assault with air protection by Alouette gunships. The attack took place on 2 August around midday with an attack by Mirages followed by an Alouette gunships who were attacked by **14.5 mm** AA guns and **RPG-7s**. 32 Battalion was the first wave of ground troops dropped in by **Puma** helicopters followed by a second wave of paratroopers. The battle ended after some fierce fighting. One soldier of 32 Battalion had been killed and two were wounded. As for the PLAN soldiers, 144 died during the battle with weapons and ammunitions captured.

3 August began with the receipt of signal intelligence concerning FAPLA proposing to move a twenty-two vehicle logistics convoy from Techamutete to Cuvelai. This was to resupply the 11th Brigade with artillery shells it had expended on the 31 July. A quickly prepared plan was developed with an air-drop by helicopter of a 61 Mech ambush platoon along the road. The ambush began around 05h30 on the 4 August stopping the convoy and destroying some of the vehicles. Alouette gunships followed up and by 08h00 the ambush was over with twenty vehicles destroyed and two captured. The rest of 61 Mechanised Battalion reached the ambush platoon later that day. The following days to the 9 August were quiet with the 61 Mechanised Battalion remaining close to the Techamutete/Cuvelai road.

By the 9 August a PLAN base was discovered north of the Mui River about 15 km to the west of the **Cuvelai/Techamatette** road by members of the 32 Battalion reconnaissance units. 32 Battalion and 1 Parachute troops were airlifted by **Puma's** accompanied by Alouette gunships around midday to the base. During a second air-drop, the helicopters were ambushed en route to the base by a hidden PLAN anti-aircraft teams and resulted in one Puma helicopter being shot down killing the three airmen and twelve paratroopers. Alouettes gunships attacked the crash site dispersing the PLAN soldiers around the downed helicopter and 61 Mechanised elements move up to site to retrieve the bodies and the helicopter. The helicopter wreck itself was removed the following day. In total, 106 PLAN soldiers were killed at the base that was attacked.

Another PLAN base was discovered on the 10 August by the 32 Battalion reconnaissance units about 30 km north

of Cuvelai. Again it was attacked by Mirages and Alouette gunships. Around 11h00 the infantry companies of 32 Battalion and 1 Parachute Battalion were air-dropped into the contact area guided by the gunships and attacked the base. The attack killed 116 PLAN soldiers with no losses by the SADF forces.

14.4 Aftermath

PLAN casualties for this operation were calculated at 345 killed.^[1] The SADF forces had captured or destroyed vast amounts of ammunition and stores and gathered vital intelligence data. The operation was announced to the South African public by the SADF Headquarters on the 15 August. It was believed this operation would not have been revealed had it not been for the high casualty figure of 29 SADF soldiers who had died during the fighting.^[2] This could not be hidden from the South African public.

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Chapter 15

Operation Phoenix (South Africa)

Operation Phoenix was an operation in 1983 by the **South African Defence Force** and **South West African Territorial Force** in response to a major incursion by **PLAN** fighters from Angola into the white farming areas of northern South-West Africa.

15.1 Background

SWAPO's military wing PLAN had created a specialised infiltration unit called Volcano. Members of this unit had spent the second half of 1982 receiving training from East German, Cuban and Russian instructors and were regarded as best PLAN soldiers.^{[1]:107} By January 1983, 1000 to 1700 members of Volcano began the journey south to the Angolan/South West Africa border.^{[1]:107[2]:200} They were then formed into fourteen companies of 50 to 70 soldiers. Their mission was for thirteen of those companies, was to cross the border and engage the SWATF and SADF forces while the last company would not engage those forces but instead head southwards to the white farming areas of northern South West Africa.^{[1]:107}

15.2 Operation

On the 13 February 1983, the thirteen companies headed into **Kaokoland**, **Ovamboland** and **Kavango**.^{[1]:107} The fourteenth company headed for the white farmers in **Kamanjab**, **Outjo**, **Tsumeb** and **Otjiwarongo** areas.^{[1]:107} The South African forces operation began on 15 February when the incursions came to their attention. By the beginning of March the PLAN soldiers in the main force, who were kept busy by the SADF/SWATF forces, had taken 155 casualties but had succeed in laying mines and attacking and kidnapping civilians.^{[1]:108} The small PLAN force, being chased by the South African's, were now 50 km from the white farming areas.^{[1]:108} By early March, the smaller force had reached the farmlands and had attacked a homestead. But by early April, SADF/SWATF soldiers had caught up to the group and no PLAN fighters from the fourteenth unit were alive and had failed to achieve their objectives.^{[1]:108} The operation wound down with mopping up operations and ended on 15 April.^{[1]:108}

15.3 Aftermath

In the two month operation 27 members of the SADF and SWATF lost their lives with PLAN's Volcano unit losing 309 fighters.^{[1]:108} Civilian casualties totalled 33 dead and 161 kidnapped and taken back to SWAPO bases in Angola.^{[2]:107}

15.4 References

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Chapter 16

Operation Skerwe

Operation Skerwe was a military operation conducted by the South African Air Force (SAAF) during the Mozambican Civil War against African National Congress (ANC) facilities based in the Maputo suburb of Matola.

16.1 Background

On the 20 May 1984, a car bomb exploded in the late afternoon in Church Street, Pretoria. The target was the South African Air Force Headquarters timed to catch the staff leaving the building for home.^{[1]:Chp8} The bomb had been set by the ANC based in Mozambique.^[2] The car bomb killed 19 and wounded between 188 and more than 200 people.^{[2][3]}

16.2 Operation

Planning for the operation begun on 21 May, a day after the bombing when Commandant Steyn Venter was directed to take four Impala strike aircraft with rocket pods to the airbase at Hoedspruit.^{[1]:Chp8} There he was joined by eight other Impala's from 4 Squadron and 8 Squadron.^{[1]:Chp8} One Canberra bomber, from the Waterkloof airbase flown by Major Des Barker, would also take part in the operation.^{[1]:Chp8} As the aircrew planned their mission based on reconnaissance photographs, video and models of the targets, ground crews readied the aircraft for the mission the following day.^{[1]:Chp8[4]} The planned called for a low level approach down the river into Maputo then climbing for the attack on the street in Matola in pairs, in line astern positions, attack only if the targets were visible, before climbing left and the returning to a low level formation back to South Africa.^{[1]:Chp8} The mission for Sunday 22 May, after initial issues with the aircraft and low cloud, was called off after taxiing to the runway.^{[1]:Chp8} On Monday 23 May, the aircraft took off at 06h40 for Maputo. The Canberra bomber contacted the Maputo control tower informing them of the raid and not to interfere.^{[1]:Chp8[4]} The Impala strike aircraft then lined up for the attack with most firing their rockets at the target houses in the street.^{[1]:Chp8} The South African Impala aircraft arrived back safely at the airbase at Hoedspruit with little fuel to spare while the Canberra bomber returned to Waterkloof outside Pretoria.^{[1]:Chp8}

16.3 Aftermath

The casualty figures are conflicting with the Mozambique government claiming that 6 people died including 2 children and 26 people wounded. The South African military claiming 64 people killed, 41 being ANC operatives, 17 Mozambican soldiers and 6 civilians while other sources claimed 8 civilians died.^{[5][1]:Chp8}

Western diplomats and journalists were given a three hour guided tour of Matola by the Mozambican Information Ministry officials.^[5] They were shown minimal rocket damage to building's and a juice and jam factory with little to show that the ANC lived in the street with residents claiming the ANC residents had moved out three months earlier.^[5] The South African military claimed that the site had been sanitized before the visit and that they had attacked the planning offices of the ANC unit responsible for the Pretoria bombings.^{[1]:Chp8} The South Africans also claimed they had neutralized an antiaircraft missile site.^[2]

16.4 References

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Chapter 17

Operation Dolfyn

Operation Dolfyn was a military operation in Angola from May 1983 by the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the Angolan Civil War and South African Border War.

17.1 Background

The aim of the operation locate and destroy the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) Eastern Command headquarters which was thought to be north of Cuvelai as well any other bases in the area.^{[1]:164} The operation took place during May and June 1983 and consisted of many small contacts.^{[1]:164} The SADF units consisted of elements from 61 Mechanised Battalion, 32 Battalion, 4 SAI, 44 Parachute Brigade and Regiment Groot Karoo.^{[1]:164} The operation ended around the beginning of July.^{[1]:164} The town of Cuvelai would again be the target of the SADF during Operation Askari at the end of December 1983.

17.2 Further reading

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Chapter 18

Operation Karton

Operation Karton was a secret military operation during August 1983 by the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War.

18.1 Background

Cangamba is an Angolan town in the province of Moxico. It was garrisoned by FAPLA's 32 Brigade and forty to sixty Cuban instructors and due to the conditions of the roads in the region, was supplied by air from Menongue.^{[1]:166} During late July, UNITA had briefly raided the town but FAPLA failed to strengthen its defences.^{[1]:167} UNITA sought the help of the SADF for mortar and artillery training as well as fire support in the next attack against Cangamba.^{[2]:Ch8} A SADF artillery team was formed and flown to a secret special forces base in the Caprivi where they met to train the UNITA artillerymen in captured Soviet 120 mm mortars and 76 mm artillery before moving northwards into Angola.^{[2]:Ch8}

18.2 Battle

UNITA attacked on 1 August with between 3000 and 6000 soldiers with the SADF team assisting the next day with artillery observation.^{[1]:167} The FAPLA troops in Cangamba called for reinforcements which were assembled in Huambo, Menongue and Lubango but would take a week to cross UNITA territory to reach the garrison.^{[1]:167} The FAPLA garrison was bombarded by UNITA artillery for three days before attempting frontal assaults which incurred high casualties.^{[1]:167} UNITA then resorted to digging trenches driving them closer to the Angolan positions.^{[1]:167} The UNITA artillery attack continued and by the 7 August the FAPLA and Cuban troops were short of ammunition and water.^{[1]:168} By this time the UNITA troops were being subjected to FAPLA/Cuban air attacks and took casualties.^{[1]:168} On the 10 August, the FAPLA relief columns arrived covered by a FAPLA/Cuban air strike on UNITA positions.^{[1]:168} The Cuban troop were said to be airlifted out while garrison and relief columns had to fight their way out.^{[1]:169} Two days after the relief columns arrived, the South African Air Force (SAAF) was called in on 12 August to assist UNITA.^{[1]:169} Canberra bombers and Impala aircraft were used to flatten the town and by 14 August the battle was over.^{[1]:168}

18.3 Aftermath

UNITA was said to have lost 1100 soldiers and possibly the same amount wounded while the FAPLA forces lost several hundred men and 20 Cubans.^{[1]:169}

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Chapter 19

Operation Klinker

Operation Klinker (aka Operation Rondebosch) was a military operation in **Angola** during December 1983 by the **South African Defence Force (SADF)** and **South African Air Force (SAAF)** during the **Angolan Civil War** and **South African Border War**.

19.1 Background

The object of this operation was an attack on a People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) training base in Angola, intimidating them into a belief that the SADF could strike them anywhere and that it too could be a target of **Operation Askari**.^{[1]:113} The Tobias Hainyeko Training Centre was located close to the city of **Lubango** and was used to train PLAN recruits in various military fields.^{[2]:4} A **special forces** team had been deployed in the Lubango area between November and December 1983 to conduct reconnaissance.^{[2]:3} The raid took on the morning of 29 December 1983, by four **Buccaneer** strike aircraft of **24 Squadron**.^{[2]:4} Thirty two bombs were dropped by the SAAF aircraft, some exploded immediately while the rest were on delayed charges making the base temporally unusable.^{[2]:4}

19.2 Further reading

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Chapter 20

Operation Askari

Operation Askari was a military operation during 1983 in Angola by the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War.

20.1 Background

Operation Askari, launched on 6 December 1983, was the SADF's sixth large-scale cross-border operation into Angola and was intended to disrupt the logistical support and command & control capabilities of **People's Liberation Army of Namibia** (PLAN) the military wing of the South West Africa People's Organisation **SWAPO**, in order to suppress a large-scale incursion into **South West Africa** that was planned for the beginning of 1984. The People's **Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola** (FAPLA) of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the **Angolan** governing party, were targeted during this mission as PLAN bases were close to FAPLA bases and had been used as a place of refuge during SADF operations.

20.2 Planning

Operation Askari was planned to begin on 9 November 1983 but was postponed for one month because the South African government was conducting talks with African leaders.^{[1]:Ch5} The operation would instead begin on 9 December with four phases planned. The first phase involved placing **special forces** teams around **Lubango**, operating to gather intelligence for an SAAF attack known as **Operation Klinker** on 29 December, against a PLAN training base outside that town.^{[1]:Ch5} Phase two consisted of reconnaissance, probing and attacks on the Angolan towns of Cahama, Mulondo and Cuvelai to force the FAPLA and PLAN troops to flee the towns during mid December to mid January.^{[1]:Ch5} Phase three was the domination of the area of concern by the SADF.^{[1]:Ch5} And the final phase, halting any infiltration of PLAN units through the area dominated into SWA/Namibia.^{[1]:Ch5}

20.3 Order of Battle

20.3.1 South African and South West Africa Territorial forces

^{[1]:Ch5[2]:165}

Operation commander - Brigadier Joep Joubert

Task Force X-Ray - Commandant Gert van Zyl / Commandant Ep van Lill / Commandant Welgemoed

- three mechanized companies - 61 Mechanised Battalion (plus 4 **SAI** and 8 **SAI**)
- one armoured car squadron – 1 SSB - Ratel 90
- two troops MRL – **Valkiri** MRLS



Eland-90 armoured car. Askari marked its final deployment in Angola with the SADF.

- one G-4 155mm battery
- one G-2 140mm battery
- two Ystervark 20mm AA battery

Task Force Victor - Commandant Faan Greyling

- one mechanized company - 1 SAI
- one mechanized company - Regiment Groot Karoo / Regiment de la Rey
- one Eland-90 armoured car squadron - Regiment Mooirivier / Regiment Molopo
- one G-2 140mm battery
- one troop MRL – 4 SAI - Valkiri MRLS
- two anti-aircraft troops

Task Force Echo-Victor - Commandant Eddie Viljoen

- four motorized infantry companies - 32 Battalion

Task Force Tango

- one mechanized company - 4 SAI
- one armoured car squadron - 1 & 2 Special Service Battalion



FAPLA 9K31 Strela-1 captured at Cuvelai during Askari.

- one troop 140mm G-2 artillery – 2 SAI

Combat Team Manie

- four platoons motorized infantry - 202 Battalion
- two platoons motorized infantry - 7 SAI
- one armoured car squadron
- one 81mm mortar platoon

20.3.2 FAPLA/SWAPO forces

Cahama

- 2nd Brigade
- Cuban battalion
- PLAN Western HQ

Mulondo

- 19th Brigade

Cuvelai

- 11 Brigade
- two Cuban battalions
- PLAN's Moscow, Alpha and Bravo battalions

Caiundo

- 53rd Brigade

20.4 Battles**20.4.1 Battle of Quiteve**

The objective for the towns of **Quiteve** and Mulondo was again to conduct a probe of the towns defence's by ground forces, attacking it by artillery and by aircraft, in doing so intimidating the FAPLA forces into fleeing the town.^{[3]:5} Task Force X-Ray left Xangongo on 11 December with its first target at Quiteve which was taken on 12 December without much fighting as FAPLA had fled the town.^{[2]:169} Two FAPLA tanks had been sent south from Mulondo towards Quiteve but they attacked by SAAF Mirages destroying one, the other retreated.^{[2]:169} Task Force X-Ray then moved south west to Cahama.^{[2]:169}

20.4.2 Battle of Mulondo

After an advance by FAPLA infantry and tanks from Mulondo had been stopped by a SAAF air attack, a smaller SADF force called Combat Team Tango, was sent forward with artillery to the area around the town of Mulondo with the same objective that had been achieved with Quiteve.^{[1]:Ch5[2]:169} From around 16 December until around 15 January 1984, the SADF plan called for action to force FAPLA's 19th Brigade to withdraw from the area and position **UNITA** troops in their place.^{[1]:Ch5[3]:5} During this phase, FAPLA successfully used their own recesses to track the small SADF force and were successful in attacking the South Africans with artillery, forcing them to withdraw frequently.^{[3]:6} This forced the SAAF to conduct air missions against this town, drawing away missions that were to be utilised against Cahama and Cuvelai. In one of these attacks on 23 December, a **Impala** strike aircraft was struck and damaged by a **SA-9** surface-to-air missile but returned to base at **Ongiva**.^{[1]:Ch5[3]:6} The plan to take Mulondo failed and by the early January a political decision had been made to end this part of Operation Askari.^{[3]:6} FAPLA's 19th Brigade maintained their nerve and stayed in place.^{[3]:5}

20.4.3 Battle of Cahama

The objective for the town of **Cahama** was again to conduct a probe of the towns defence's by ground forces, attacking it by artillery and by aircraft, in doing so intimidating the FAPLA and PLAN forces into fleeing their areas of control around the town.^{[3]:5} The ground and air plan was to begin during mid December until mid January, but in reality, special forces teams were already operating, since mid November, around the town and to the north disrupting the enemies logistics route from Chibemba.^{[3]:5} PLAN headquarters to the west of Cahama was bombed by the SAAF in early December and remaining forces fled to the safety of FAPLA defences in the town.^{[2]:169} The objective was the responsibility of Task Force X-Ray which moved into position on 16 December after leaving the town of **Quiteve**.^{[3]:5} Two teams positioned themselves to the east of the town while the third was positioned to the north.^{[2]:171} Bombing from the air and bombardment from artillery begun immediately on the town's defences. FAPLA artillery returned fire and artillery duels begun.^{[2]:171} Some of the air support was reduced when Task Force Mannie got into trouble in Caiundo.^{[3]:5} FAPLA, fearing that the combat team positioned north of the town meant a SADF attack towards Chibemba and Lubango, launched an armoured column of tanks and personnel carriers towards Cahama.^{[4]:6} The attack by T-55 tanks was fought off by Ratel-90's crews better mobility and training despite being undergunned.^{[2]:173}

A side operation known as **Operation Fox** was conducted to capture a **SA-8** battery south west of Cahama. Making use of air and ground forces, the objective was to drive the battery away from the towns defence's to a better position for SADF ground and special forces to capture it intact.^{[3]:5} The plan failed and by 31 December a political decision

had been made, brought about by international pressure, to end this part of Operation Askari.^{[3]:5} FAPLA's 2nd Brigade had maintained their nerve and stayed in place.^{[3]:5} Task Force X-Ray then moved north east to Cuvelai to assist Task Force Victor.^{[2]:176}

20.4.4 Battle of Cuvelai

Task Force Victor, consisting mostly of citizen force soldiers, were tasked with probing and attacking a PLAN camp and a FAPLA brigade in and around Cuvelai.^{[2]:171} They moved from Mongua to Cuvelai and the probing of enemy positions began. By 28 December, plans were changed to wrap up Operation Askari by 31 December, which meant Task Force Victor's orders were to attack the PLAN camp a few miles north east of the town that was heavily defended and surrounded by minefields.^{[2]:172} After the attack began, the task force was counterattacked by FAPLA tanks from Cuvelai that had come to PLAN's defence.^{[5]:181} The attack was stopped by Eland-90s and artillery by a task force ill-equipped with antitank weapons. The enemy remained in place and the task force was then tasked to attack Cuvelai from the northeast.^{[2]:174} This attack went ahead in bad weather, flooded rivers, into prepared enemy minefields and against positions manned by 23mm AA guns backed by tanks.^{[2]:174} There were also problems in leadership by some junior SADF officers and refusal to follow orders by some soldiers.^{[2]:174} Commandant Greyling finally ordered a withdrawal but it turned into a disordered retreat and he was eventually able to regroup his task force.^{[2]:175} Greyling was ordered to re-attack but he refused without better planning and reconnaissance.^{[2]:175}

Brigadier Joubert made a decision to reinforce Task Force Victor for a final attack on Cuvelai.^{[2]:176} Task Force X-Ray arrived very tired at Cuvelai on 3 January, to reinforce Task Force Victor, after spending 16 hours marching from Cahama.^{[3]:8} Commandant van Lill took over command of Task Force Victor from Commandant Greyling for the joint attack planned for 4 January and had to deal with further "unrest" in the ranks of Victor.^{[2]:176} Enemy radio intercepts also reported requests for further FAPLA and Cuban reinforcements.^{[2]:176} Units were rearranged and an attack planned with Victor attacking Cuvelai from the south and X-Ray from the east.^{[2]:176}

On the afternoon of 3 January, the FAPLA positions in and around Cuvelai were attacked by the SADF in two waves.^{[3]:8} The first wave consisted 10 Impalas and 4 Canberra bombers while the second wave consisted of Impala strike aircraft.^{[3]:8} The aim of the bombing raids were to destroy the FAPLA artillery and the anti-aircraft guns that would be used against the SADF armoured personnel carriers.^{[3]:8} SADF radio intercepts of the FAPLA garrisons reports to Lubango, reported loses of 75% of their artillery.^{[3]:8}

On 4 January, around 8am, the SADF attack began supported by artillery.^{[2]:177} The Ratel-20 personnel carriers had to cross minefields to reach the enemy positions and frequently retreated when encountering the hidden 23mm AA positions.^{[2]:177} The SADF artillery was supported by an Allouette helicopter used in a spotter role, flown by Captain Carl Alberts, who won a *Honoris Crux* medal when he used his aircraft as bait to identify the 23mm AA gun positions.^{[2]:178} FAPLA counterattacked with ten T-55 tanks which succeeded in destroying a Ratel and killing five men, but the tanks were eventually driven off by artillery and finally destroyed by Ratel-90's in the afternoon.^{[2]:178} Another medal was won one by Lieutenant Alexander Macaskill trying to rescue the five men in the Ratel.^{[2]:178} By the late afternoon, most of the enemy positions were in SADF hands with the remaining FAPLA troops fleeing northwards towards Techamutete.^{[2]:179}

Earlier Combat Team Echo Victor had been tasked to clear PLAN positions north of Cuvelai and south of Techamutete.^{[2]:180[6]:Ch11} During this period, against orders, Techamutete was taken by the Echo Victor on 24 December after the town garrison fled but were then told to hold the town.^{[2]:180[6]:Ch11} After the final attack on Cuvelai on 3 January 1984, Combat Team Echo Victor was used as a stopper group against enemy forces fleeing that town.^{[2]:180} The retreating enemy forces from Cuvelai fled towards the town on 5 January only to be attacked by 32 Battalion.^{[2]:180} An anti-tank team was then detached from Combat Team Tango to support Echo Victor who had destroyed a fleeing T-54 tank, but they arrived late due to logistical issues.^{[2]:181} Operations continue in the Techamutete region, with all units, barr 32 Battalion, back at bases in SWA/Namibia by 13–15 January.^{[2]:181} Small SADF units remained in Calueque, N'Giva and Xangongo.^{[5]:181}

20.4.5 Battle of Caiundo

Combat Team Manie's role was to deceive the enemy as to where the real SADF attack would be coming from. Manie's target was the town of Caiundo. Combat Team Manie advanced from Rundu towards Caiundo where it began to probe the towns defences hoping, as was the plan, to frighten the FAPLA troops of the 53rd Brigade into fleeing the town. During one of these probes, a SADF platoon, who got too close the town, was discovered by a FAPLA reconnaissance team. On 18 December 1983, a FAPLA company attacked the platoon. Sources differ on

the SADF casualties, with nine dead, one missing, one captured to as low as five dead and one captured.^{[2]:172[3]:7} A vehicle, weapons, and equipment were seized by the Angolans.^{[3]:7} South African air assets were moved from their missions in Culuvai to Caiundo.^{[2]:172} By the end of hostilities in January, the air and ground attacks had failed to dislodge FAPLA from the towns defenses. The captured black member of the SWATF was exchanged on 23 May 1984 for 30 Angolans and 1 Cuban.^[7]

20.5 Aftermath



Roll of 61 Mechanised personnel killed during Askari.

Both sides took casualties. On the Angolan side, casualties were FAPLA 426 killed and 3 captured, PLAN 45 killed and 11 captured, while the Cubans lost 5 killed and 1 captured.^{[1]:Ch5} SADF casualties were 21 killed in action while 4 died accidentally.^{[1]:Ch5} Wounded in action for the SADF included 65 men with another 18 wounded accidentally with 11 wounded in vehicle accidents for a total of 94 soldiers.^{[1]:Ch5} The SADF captured vast amounts of Angolan equipment and supplies especially after the capture of the town of Cuvelai.

The end result of Operation Askari was the **Lusaka Accords** and the implementation of a Joint Monitoring Commission. By 5 January 1984, SWAPO's **Sam Nujoma** requested the **UN Secretary General** to arrange a ceasefire.^{[5]:181} With the help of the Americans, this was concluded between Angola and South Africa on 31 January.^{[5]:182} On 6 February, Foreign Minister **Pik Botha** proposed a Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC) to monitor withdrawals and violations of the ceasefire.^{[5]:182} Talks concluded with an agreement called the Lusaka Accord that detailed the formation and implementation of the JMC which after many weeks of disagreements, finally met on 3 May at N'Giva, Angola.^{[5]:182}

On 12 January 1984 in Moscow, the Soviets decided to increase military aid to Angola, placing more modern military equipment in the country and increasing the radar network across southern Angola so as to reduce the SAAF operating capability.^{[5]:182} This would take around fourteen months and would result in plan to attack UNITA in south-eastern Angola.^{[5]:183}

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- [2] Scholtz, Leopold (2013). *The SADF in the Border War 1966-1989*. Cape Town: Tafelberg. ISBN 978-0-624-05410-8.
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Chapter 21

Operation Boswilger

Operation Boswilger was a military operation by the South African Defence Force (SADF) in June 1985 during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War. The SADF soldiers pursued SWAPO's, PLAN insurgents from South-West Africa/Namibia across the border into Angola.

21.1 Background

On 28 June, PLAN insurgents entered South-West Africa damaging a bridge between Epali and Ondangwa, sabotaging telephone poles, mortaring the Eenhana SADF base and a bomb was detonated at the Ongwediva Teachers Training College^{[1]:132}

On 29 June 1985, South West Africa Territory Force (SWATF) mechanised reaction teams set off in a hot pursuit operation following the tracks of the insurgents across the border into Angola. Bases were attacked up to 40 km inside Angola. The operation lasted two days before the SWATF withdrew back across the border to SWA.

At the end of the operation, 56 PLAN insurgents had been killed with one casualty from the SWATF with weapons and ammunition captured.^{[1]:132}

21.2 Further reading

- Steenkamp, Willem (1989). *South Africa's border war, 1966-1989*. Gibraltar: Ashanti Pub. ISBN 0620139676.

21.3 References

- [1] Steenkamp, Willem (1989). *South Africa's border war, 1966-1989*. Gibraltar: Ashanti Pub. ISBN 0620139676.

Coordinates: 17°19′22″S 13°55′16″E / 17.3227°S 13.9211°E

Chapter 22

Operation Cabinda

Main article: [South African Border War](#)

The **Operation Argon** (sometimes called *Cabinda Operation*) was a controversial and high-profile military operation carried out by the [South African Special Forces](#) (“Recces”) during the [South African Border War](#). The aim of the operation was the destruction of the oil facilities at [Cabinda Gulf](#) and disrupting the foreign exchange received by [Angola](#) from the sale of this oil.^[1]

22.1 Background

On 13 May 1985 a [South African Navy](#) strike craft carrying a [Recce](#) team as well as a back-up team left [Saldanha Bay](#) and travelled to a spot some way off the [Angolan](#) coast near its border with [Zaire](#). The mission was to confirm the existence of [African National Congress](#) (ANC) bases and [South-West Africa People’s Organisation](#) (SWAPO) bases near [Cabinda](#). The area contained oil storage installations run by the [Angolans](#) and [Gulf Oil](#), and because of this, several large military bases were also in the vicinity. Speculative reports had mentioned [U.S.](#) veterans and ex-SAS guarding the installations.

The [Recces](#) landed on the coast at night on 20 May following an advance scouting party sent to gather [intelligence](#) on the beach where the party would land. Under ideal cloudy skies, the [Recce](#) team’s trip had been slowed by the need to launch their boats further from shore than anticipated. The longer journey, as well as rough seas, threw off the precise timing of the mission. Near shore, Captain Wynand Du Toit noticed a small [fishing vessel](#) in the area of the landing zone and that the occupants were on shore around a fire. This forced the team to wait offshore until the boat left the area. They were now three hours behind schedule, and the danger of being detected grew.

Upon landing the boats were hidden and a [rendezvous](#) point set up. The men climbed a [bluff](#) and followed a route that skirted a small village and led to a road. They miscalculated the distance to the road and turned back, losing an hour of valuable time. Du Toit decided to continue and reach the lying up position (LUP) in a densely wooded area within the two hours prior to dawn. [South African Intelligence](#) and [aerial photographs](#) showed an uninhabited area, but in fact it was surrounded by [camouflaged](#) [People’s Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola](#) (FAPLA) bases. The hide was finally reached as day broke. This proved to be far from ideal as a hiding place, as it was not part of the jungle, but an island of dense growth some distance from the jungle. The [Recces](#) hid in the undergrowth and spread into a defensive perimeter, one man at an [observation post](#) several yards to the north with a view of the course they had travelled.

As dawn broke, the features of a well-hidden FAPLA base became clear some 1,000 yards (910 m) from the LUP. A few hours later, a small FAPLA patrol could be seen following the tracks they had left the night before. The team watched as the patrol withdrew, and then came back with a larger patrol which passed the hide. At 17.00 a three-men patrol followed the team’s trail directly to the thicket where the [Recces](#) were hidden. They stopped short of entering the brush, and returned to their base. Meanwhile a second patrol approached the hide from the other direction, and opened up heavy fire on the hidden position. As [rocket propelled grenades](#) (RPGs) struck their position, Captain Du Toit ordered the withdrawal of his troops. They had no choice but to double back on the trail that brought them to this position the previous night. Two of the men were wounded as they exited the trees. FAPLA troops deployed 50 yards (46 m) west of the site opened up with [RPD machine guns](#), [RPG](#) and many [AK-47s](#). The team turned north,

pursued by FAPLA soldiers. Another group of Angolan soldiers advanced from the west, **flanking** the Recces so that they could only go east now. They could see a group of trees, but needed to cross 40 yards (37 m) of waist-high grass to get to this cover. Du Toit took two men and made his way through the grass as the rest of the team hid in the thicket. The small team drew fire as over 30 troops moved onto the exposed position. One Recce, Corporal Rowland Liebenberg, was killed as his two comrades fought on. The fighting continued for a full 45 minutes. The two men started to run out of **ammunition** and were both wounded, Sergeant Louis van Breda later died and Du Toit nearly so.

The contact was over and two South African soldiers were dead. While Du Toit lay on his stomach, FAPLA soldiers approached and, thinking he was also dead, stripped his equipment – only then did they realise he was alive and shot him again through the neck. He remained awake with wounds in his neck, shoulder and arm as the FAPLA soldiers began to savagely beat him. The soldiers thought that he was a **mercenary**, though Du Toit tried to explain that he was in fact a **South African Army** officer. After being severely roughed up, he was finally taken to **Cabinda** for medical treatment then to a **Luanda** hospital. The remaining six Recce soldiers carefully made their way north, where they regrouped and were eventually picked up to be returned safely to **South Africa**. Their escape was due in part to being ignored after the Angolans captured Du Toit.

22.2 Aftermath

Captain Wynand du Toit was finally to be released in 7 September 1987 after some 837 days of **solitary confinement** in an Angolan prison in a complicated prisoner exchange arrangement. The exchange took place in **Maputo, Mozambique** where Du Toit was swapped for two ANC members and a 133 Angolan soldiers.^[2]

22.3 References

- [1] The Modern Trek(Part 1) <http://beta.mnet.co.za/carteblanche/Article.aspx?Id=4631>
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22.5 See also

- 1980s in Angola
- List of operations of the South African Border War
- Military history of South Africa
- South African Border War
- South African National Defence Force
- South African Special Forces Brigade

Chapter 23

Operation Wallpaper

Operation Wallpaper (aka Operation Weldmesh)^[1] was a military operation by the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the Angolan Civil War and South African Border War.^[2]

SADF and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) forces defeated a coalition of Cuban and People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) troops, fighting on behalf of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), in September 1985 around Mavinga. The SADF victory later helped UNITA militants defeat the MPLA troops in the Battle of Lomba River I.^[2]

23.1 Background

In mid 1985, the Angolan government formulated an offensive called Operation Congresso II. The plan called for the largest ever two frontal attack on UNITA forces in Angola. The Angolan forces were to be advised and led by Soviet and Cuban military advisors and supported by South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) and African National Congress (ANC) combatants, as well as tanks, artillery and aircraft. The plan called for a simultaneous attack on Cazombo in the east and Mavinga in the south-east and to take one or both objectives by 3 September.^{[3]:213} The objective of the operation was to split UNITA forces, forcing them to fight on two fronts and therefore weakening their defensive capability. The potential loss of Mavinga by UNITA could give FAPLA the opportunity to stage a further attack on UNITA's capital at Jamba.^{[3]:213} The South Africans believed that if Mavinga was taken, FAPLA would move its air defence network southwards, threatening the South African Air Force (SAAF) ability to protect Jamba from Angolan air attack, making it susceptible to ground attack and opening southern Angola to increased SWAPO activity into Namibia.^{[3]:214}

The offensive started at the end of July, with UNITA initiating spoiling attacks against the FAPLA columns as they moved towards their objectives. By the beginning of September, FAPLA had reached the outskirts of UNITA's defensive positions around the towns of Cazombo and Mavinga. The SADF involvement would take two parts: Operation Wallpaper involved the airborne movement of UNITA troops from Cazombo to Mavinga while Operation Weldmesh concerned the defense of UNITA around Mavinga.^{[4]:244}

23.2 Order of Battle

23.2.1 South African forces^{[3]:217}

32 Battalion

- Three rifle companies
- 81mm mortar group
- Machine gun section
- Assault Pioneer section

- Three reconnaissance teams
- Headquarters

Two SA-9 teams

MRL troop

61 Mechanised Infantry Battalion held in reserve in Namibia

23.2.2 UNITA forces^{[3]:217}

2,400 men including 250 men defending Mavinga

23.2.3 Angolan forces^{[3]:214}

- 7th Brigade
- 8th Brigade
- 13th Brigade
- 25th Brigade

23.3 Battle

The Angolan brigades left **Cuito Cuanavale** on 15 August, with the 8th and 13th following the main road to Mavinga via the town of Cunjamba and the 7th and 25th moving southwards following the Cunzumbia and Cuzizi rivers and having reached the Lomba river, flanking left and followed that river to an area north of Mavinga.^{[3]:217} Operation Wallpaper came into being on 7 September when the South African Defence Force (SADF) **32 Battalion** was given the go ahead to move to Mavinga.^{[3]:217} The troops of 32 Battalion and additional attachments were dressed in UNITA uniforms and flown to Mavinga by the SAAF.^{[3]:217} All additional equipment was driven across the border to Mavinga. **61 Mechanised Infantry Battalion** was placed in reserve.^{[3]:217} UNITA had deployed 2,400 men to defend the positions around Mavinga, with 250 men to defend the town and airfield itself. The Angolan forces were now 50 km north west of Mavinga.

By 8 September the South African equipment had arrived and by 11 September the SADF units were in position to support UNITA and attack the FAPLA brigades. On the early morning of 12 September the SADF **Valkiri multiple rocket launchers** began to strike the FAPLA 8 and 13 Brigades which had stopped to resupply. The MRL attack ended at daybreak with the Angolan Air Force searching for their positions during daylight hours,^{[3]:217} but the MRL attack failed to slow the Angolan brigades and they resumed their advance. By 15 September, all four brigades met south of the Lomba River, 30 km north west of Mavinga. UNITA and the SADF units had failed to slow or stop the advance.^{[3]:217} Meanwhile far to the north, UNITA had to retreat south from Cazombo on the 19 September as FAPLA took the town.^{[3]:215} Over a number of nights, the SAAF evacuated at least a 1000 UNITA soldiers from that region, flying them and their equipment into Mavinga.^{[1][3]:215} Having learnt from SADF reconnaissance units around the Cuito Cuanavale airfield that the Angolan brigades were being supplied by helicopter, SAAF **Atlas Impalas** were sent to intercept these **Mil Mi-17** and **Mil Mi-25** helicopters when alerted to their movements by those reconnaissance units.^{[3]:218} Eventually the Angolans lost 10 helicopters and started using smaller **Aérospatiale Alouette IIIs** to resupply their forces. Ten Soviet advisors were also killed as they landed at Cuito Cuanavale after being intercepted by a SAAF **Dassault Mirage F1**.^{[5]:194}

By 2 October, the Angolan brigades were 10 km from Mavinga but had suffered heavy losses from UNITA attacks and the SADF MRLs.^{[3]:218} At this point FAPLA morale was low and with the evacuation of the Russian advisors^{[4]:245} the Angolan forces were beginning to desert. Over two days of air attacks by SAAF Impala and Mirage aircraft, ground bombardments from the MRLs and with reduced supply and unit fighting ability,^{[6]:136} the Angolan brigades were ordered to retreat westwards and then to head for Cuito Cuanavale. By 4 October, 32 Battalion units began to withdraw.^{[3]:218}

23.4 Vital air support

The SAAF played a very important role in logistical support to the SADF Forces and UNITA against a coalition of Cuban and FAPLA troops moving in on Mavinga. The SAAF flew 310 night flying hours transporting mainly the Valkiri Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) and their 127 mm rockets, ammunition and food; and performing Casualty Evacuation (Casevac) of wounded personnel. SAAF Lockheed C-130 Hercules, Transall C-160 and Douglas C-47 Skytrain aircraft were used.

23.5 Aftermath

It was realised by the South Africans at the end of the operation that it would be impossible for UNITA forces to stop a combined Angolan and Cuban force and that Mavinga would have fallen had it not been for the assistance of the SADF.^{[3]:218} The Angolan forces back in their base, began to rebuild while waiting for the rainy season to end and resume Operation Congresso II.^{[6]:136} The South African's suffered one soldier accidentally killed,^{[3]:218} while 500 UNITA soldiers died and 1500 wounded^{[5]:195} with other sources claiming dead and wounded to be as high as 2500.^[1] Angolan casualty figures range from 1589^{[3]:219} to 2500^{[5]:194} to as high as 4719^[1] soldiers killed. Soviet casualties are listed as 10 dead and 9 wounded, while the Cubans lost 56 men and 60 wounded.^{[5]:195}

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Chapter 24

Operation Cerebus

Operation Cerebus was a South African Defence Force (SADF) special forces operation conducted in Angola during October 1985 during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War.

24.1 Background

To discourage any further advances by FAPLA forces towards Mavinga after Operation Wallpaper, it was decided to further hinder Angolan airforce operations between Menongue and Cuito Cuanavale. Two captured mobile SA-9 anti-aircraft missile systems were flown into the UNITA held airfield at Mavinga by South African Air Force (SAAF) C-130 Hercules.^{[1]:Ch11} They were then driven north-west by SADF special forces and UNITA soldiers to an area between Menongue, Longa and Cuito Cuanavale.^{[1]:Chp11} The operation was not successful and no aircraft shot down, the Angolan's airforce avoiding the area.^{[1]:Chp11}

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Chapter 25

Operation Southern Cross

Operation Southern Cross (1986) was a military operation by the South African Defence Force during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War.

25.1 Background

During May 1986, the South African Defence Force (SADF) began planning an operation that called for the capture of the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) controlled town and airbase at Cuito Cuanavale.^{[1]:227} The units would consist of 32 Battalion, South African Air Force, Special Forces and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) troops. The operation would be carried out at night and aided by air and artillery attacks. Cuito Cuanavale was a military base used previously to launch Cuban and Angolan attacks on the UNITA held town of Mavinga with the objective to capture it and eventually launch an attack on the UNITA headquarters at Jamba. The 13th and 25th FAPLA Brigades were deployed protect Cuito Cuanavale.^{[2]:Ch9}

This initial plan was scrapped by the SADF and modified to become just an artillery bombardment on Cuito Cuanavale. This occurred during July 1986. The SADF would use the Valkiri multiple rocket launchers and the G5 155 mm artillery guns.^{[2]:Ch9} 32 Battalion would be used for escort and protection duties. The town was bombarded for two nights and failed to achieve its destruction.^{[1]:227}

The original assault plan was then revived and this became the planning tool for Operation Alpha Centauri during August 1986.^{[1]:227}

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- [2] Wilsworth, Clive (2010). *First in, last out : the South African artillery in action 1975-1988*. Johannesburg: 30°South. ISBN 978-1920143404.

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Chapter 26

Operation Alpha Centauri

Operation Alpha Centauri (1986) was a military operation organised under the auspices of UNITA by the South African Defence Force during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War.

26.1 Background

This aim of this operation was to stop a People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) advance on the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) "capital" of Jamba. Operation Alpha Centauri was developed out of a cancelled plan that had been modified to become Operation Southern Cross that occurred during July 1986.^{[1]:227} Operation Southern Cross was not successful and therefore Operation Alpha Centauri called for a ground assault during August 1986 on the FAPLA town and airbase at Cuito Cuanavale.^{[1]:227} Originally the plan called for a night attack by 32 Battalion and UNITA troops supported by artillery but the South African government decided that the attack would be carried out by UNITA and 32 Battalion would protect the SADF support troops and artillery.^{[1]:228}

26.2 Order of Battle

^{[1]:227}

26.2.1 South African Forces

32 Battalion

- Four rifle companies
- Support company (mortar, anti-aircraft, anti-tank and assault pioneer platoons)

120mm mortar platoon (61 Mechanised Battalion)

Valkiri MRL troop

G5 155mm artillery

Ratel 90 anti-tank squadron

Ystervark anti-aircraft platoon + one BRDM SA-9 system

26.2.2 UNITA forces

Two battalions (1500 men)

26.2.3 Angolan forces

- 13th Brigade
- 25th Brigade

26.3 Battle

The SADF troops assigned to the operation began their training for the assault on Cuito Cuanavale. Meanwhile supplies were being moved up to Mavinga, establishing on 15 July a logistics base for the operation. G5 artillery was then attached to the 32 Battalion and by the end of July the SAAF begun flying in the anti-aircraft systems directly into Mavinga.

On the 29 July, the South African government made the decision that UNITA would carry out the assault on Cuito and not 32 Battalion who would again be relegated to escort and protection duties of the SADF support troops and artillery. The plan now called for UNITA to first attack the 25th Brigade east of the town and river, drawing the tanks out of the town, then capturing the bridge over the river to the town. A day later, another UNITA brigade would attack the 13th Brigade in and around the town from the south.

By the 4 August the SADF units begun position themselves around Cuito Cuanavale. SADF operation headquarters was moved to 28 km east of Cuito, the artillery and two 32 Battalion companies 60 km east and further units in between the two. 32 Battalion reconnaissance units were based even closer, 4 km from the town and an engineer team was building a bridge just 7 km south of the town's easterly bridge. However the operation was postponed as the SADF awaited the arrival of UNITA's Jonas Savimbi.

By the 13 August, UNITA was still not ready but the SADF begun to move its troops closer to the town. The SADF HQ was now 4 km from the town, the G5 artillery moved in 30 km south east and the MRLs even closer at 14 km. The artillery bombardment would begin the operation on the early evening of the 14 August, but it did not. Now the SADF commanders were becoming nervous and threatened to withdraw their troops as the Angolan air-force increased its day flights trying to establish the whereabouts of the South African troops.^{[1]:228-9} The bombardment finally began in the early evening of 15 August.

The UNITA brigade succeeded in briefly capturing the town of Cuito Cuanavale but during a counter-attack by FAPLA, and the failure of the second UNITA brigade to attack from the south, the UNITA forces were driven from the town. The bridge to the east of the town was then blown up. It was later established that UNITA had not succeeded in entering the airbase and the destruction of the airbase infrastructure was due to the SADF artillery and MRLs. By the 17 August, 32 Battalion began to withdraw back to Mavinga.

26.4 Vital artillery support

The **G5 howitzer** was used operationally for the first time by the SADF on 9 August 1986 during Operation Alpha Centauri. This operation lasted until 16 August 1986. One battery of G5's Quebec battery (a battery consists of eight guns) of Middelburg (town). At that time Quebec battery were stationed in South West Africa with 32 Battalion's Buffalo base. They were called up and dealt into 32 Battalion especially for operation Alpha Centauri. The G5 battery was employed in conjunction with one battery of **multiple rocket launchers** (MRL). The operation was an artillery attack against Cuban and FAPLA formations concentrating in **Cuito Cuanavale** for their 1986 offensive against UNITA. The 25th Cuban-FAPLA Brigade was situated east of Cuito Cuanavale near Tumpo. The 13th Brigade was situated in Cuito Cuanavale and the 8th Brigade operated between **Menongue** and **Cuito Cuanavale**, the former being a large logistics depot. Convoys regularly traveled from Menongue to supply Cuito Cuanavale.

In the weeks before the first assault, the 8 G5s were flown in darkness from **Rundu** to Mavinga (15°47'36 S 20°21'49 E) over 2 nights by **South African Air Force Lockheed C-130 Hercules** aircraft, whilst the remainder of the battery including the gun-tractors drove the distance. The heavy guns were difficult to drag through the sandy terrain and this avoided a significant part of the journey from the border to the target area.

The G5 assault began at last light, about 17h10. It was time for dinner, and the first shots were fired after most of the Brigade at Cuito Cuanavale went into the mess for supper. By 23h00 the back of the opposition was broken. Heavy fire was brought down upon the enemy in the first five hours resulting in large scale destruction. The G5s fired little during daytime, only when observation posts gave the OK.

The G5 battery, aka Quebec Battery, didn't move for the first three days, while they were shooting. This was a first for any artillery movement. Normally, after the guns fired, they would pack up and move, to avoid being fired upon.

It took the battery of G5s three days to break the offensive. Unita was left at Cuito Cuanavale, to keep control, and the battery of G5s were already retreating, when they had to turn around and go back, as Unita were chased out of Cuito Cuanavale by re-enforcements of Cuban and FAPLA forces. The battery of G5s then started another full-scale attack, taking out the re-enforcements as well. The battery of G5s then blew up a landing strip the Angolans used as an attack platform for their Migs, and an ammo-base, which exploded for hours, and burned for two-to-three days.

This destroyed the 1986 Cuban and FAPLA offensive against UNITA and showed the tremendous destructive force that lay within one battery of G5s. Owing to the long range and the accuracy with which the G5 could fire and the effect of the ammunition, authority was forced upon the enemy.

The battery of G-5s became known as the Ghost-Battery, because they couldn't be found by the opposition. As a result of the daylight activities of the **MiG-23** jet fighters employed by the Cubans, artillery fire missions could only be executed at night. As it was the first time that the G5 was used operationally there was great cause for concern that the MiGs would spot the G5s. The spotter planes flew over the G5 battery every day, but it must have looked like a dummy shelter. The MiGs were continuously in the air trying to locate the G5s and bombed the surrounding area at random in the hope of hitting the artillery.

The closest the bombs ever got to the battery of G5s, was to hit the shelter the G5s stayed at for 3 days, only 2 hours after the G5s were moved to a new shelter. The battery of G5s struggled for weeks to retreat out of Angola, because of Migs and enemy spotter planes being in the air all the time.

This operation proved to the SADF that survival was possible despite an unfavorable air situation. As a result of the enemy's **air superiority**, great attention was given to passive defensive measures such as **camouflage**, track discipline and the concealment of movement.

Special techniques of concealment were practiced beforehand which prevented the enemy from observing the artillery. Before the operation was undertaken these techniques of concealment were also tested under conditions similar to those that the artillery would experience during the operation. Another factor in favor of the artillery was the unprofessional manner in which the enemy employed its air force. The MiG fighters mostly flew at very high altitudes, making observation very difficult for the pilots. The apparent reason for this was to avoid being shot down by UNITA's **Stinger** anti-aircraft missiles. In addition, owing to the dryness of the season, the many bush fires in the area created a lot of dust and smoke in the air. During this operation approximately 2 500 **multiple rocket launcher** projectiles and approximately 4 500 G5 projectiles were used.

26.5 Aftermath

The SADF artillery and MRLs had succeeded in destroying most of the airbase's radar installations, its anti-aircraft installations and most of the fuel and ammunition depots.^{[2]:144} UNITA succeeded in destroying Angolan aircraft and tanks. As would be seen in later battles, the SADF realised that UNITA was not capable of launching conventional attacks against FAPLA and the Cuban forces and would not be able to stop a combined offensive. This SADF operation had slowed down the Angolan, Cuban and Soviet troops planned offensive against UNITA but they would again regroup around the major towns close to Cuito and rearm for the future operations.

26.6 See also

- **Battle of Cuito Cuanavale**

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Chapter 27

Operation Moduler

Operation Moduler^[1] (sometimes incorrectly called “Modular”) was a military operation by the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the South African Border War. It formed part of what has come to be called the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale. The Angolan objective was to advance south-east to attack the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) at Mavinga. The SADF objective was to protect UNITA by stopping that advance. The advance was halted with heavy Angolan casualties.

27.1 Background

In August 1987, four brigades of the Soviet-backed^[2] People’s Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) (the 47th, 59th, 16th and 21st brigades), departed from the Angolan town of Cuito Cuanavale with the aim of capturing the UNITA stronghold at Mavinga, which was the gateway to UNITA’s capital of Jamba.



- Cunjamba
- Rundu
- Cuito Cuanavale
- Jamba

- Benguela
- Calueque
- Luanda
- Mavinga
- Menongue

Angola

The presence of an armoured formation in the form of FAPLA's 47th Brigade was a threat that the relatively lightly armed UNITA could not counter, so it requested assistance from the SADF. South Africa responded by sending a mechanized force, led by a veteran unit of **Operation Askari - 61 Mechanized Battalion**. This force left the **South-West African** town of **Rundu**, crossed the border and headed north-west to intercept the 47th Brigade.^[3]

The directive given to the SADF by the South African high command was to "support UNITA to stop an offensive against Mavinga".^[4]

27.2 Battle

The FAPLA forces did not expect the South Africans to attack directly from the south, resulting in the virtual destruction of the 47th Brigade when the two forces encountered each other near the junction of the **Lomba** and **Cuzizi** rivers. This left the FAPLA forces without a screening element south of the Lomba River. At the same time, there was also heavy fighting north of the Lomba River when UNITA forces (composed of the 3rd Regular, 5th Regular, 13th Semi-Regular and 275th Special Forces Battalions^[5]) repulsed an attempt by FAPLA's 16th Brigade to capture **Cunjabamba**.

In a series of bitter fights^[6] between 9 September and 7 October, SADF and UNITA achieved their primary objective of preventing the FAPLA from crossing the river. The Soviets withdrew their advisors and left the FAPLA without senior leadership, and FAPLA crumbled and ran. FAPLA suffered heavy losses, with all four brigades losing about 60-70% of their strength. Throughout the battle, FAPLA had lost 1059 dead and 2118 wounded, along with 61 tanks, 83 armoured vehicles and 20 rocket launchers. The SADF lost 17 killed and 41 wounded, plus 5 armoured vehicles and a spotter plane. The SADF also captured a highly sophisticated SA-8 anti-aircraft missile system – the first time the weapon had fallen into western hands.^[7]

On 29 September, South African and UNITA forces, having gained the upper-hand, launched a counter-attack. The objective was to inflict a crushing blow to the FAPLA, so that they would not consider another offensive in the following year.^[8] The restrictions previously placed on the SADF by their political masters were lightened, and the SADF committed tanks for the first time. The 4th SA Infantry Battalion was added to the mix, bringing the SADF strength up to about 3000 men – the biggest of the entire campaign.^[9]

During this phase the SADF units were supported by heavy artillery and air-strikes. The airstrip at Cuito Cuanavale was extensively bombarded, causing the Cubans to withdraw their aircraft to Menongue and to abandon the Cuanavale airstrip.^[10]

The SADF tactics were based closely on the tactics used by the German commander **Erwin Rommel** in World War 2, when he crushed the British at **Gazala**.^[11]

On 9 November the SADF attacked the FAPLA 16th brigade. Air strikes and artillery were used, and tanks went into battle alongside the armoured vehicles. UNITA infantry also participated. The 16th brigade was mauled, and withdrew in disarray back across the river. The battle ended after half a day, when the SADF vehicles ran low on ammunition and broke off the attack. FAPLA had 10 tanks destroyed and 3 captured, various artillery pieces destroyed or captured, and 75 men killed. The SADF had 7 killed and 9 wounded, plus one armoured vehicle destroyed, one damaged and a tank damaged.^[12]

The second attack, on 11 November, again targeted the 16th brigade. Again 16th brigade escaped annihilation by crossing the river, but this time they lost 14 tanks and 394 men. The SADF had 5 men killed and 19 more wounded,

with 2 armoured vehicles destroyed and one tank damaged.^[13] The recovery, under fire, of a crippled tank and the subsequent re-entry of a minefield where the tank was extracted from to rescue a wounded soldier, earned Captain Petrus van Zyl and Lieutenant De Villers de Vos of 32 Battalion both *Honoris Crux* decorations.^[14]

The FAPLA 21st brigade withdrew rapidly across the river, and was pursued. On 17 November they were engaged again, and suffered 131 men killed, along with 9 tanks destroyed and about 300 other vehicles. The SADF lost 6 dead and 19 wounded, plus 4 armoured vehicles. A final attack on 25 November bogged down in heavy bush, and was eventually abandoned.^[15]

Operation Moduler achieved the objective of halting the FAPLA advance against UNITA, and inflicted heavy losses on FAPLA. After the FAPLA offensive had been stopped, the South African/UNITA force went over to the offensive, thus ending Operation Moduler and beginning *Operation Hooper*.

27.3 See also

- 32 Battalion (South Africa)
- Angolan Civil War
- List of operations of the South African Border War
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 602
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Chapter 28

Operation Firewood

Operation Firewood was a secretive military operation in 1987 by the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the Angolan Civil War and South African Border War.

28.1 Background

The PLAN Northern Command base was said to be found 35 km north of the town of Techamutete at a place called Indungo.^{[1]:350} A SADF battle group was formed and consisted of elements of 1 Parachute Battalion, 5 Reconnaissance Regiment and 101 Battalion.^{[1]:252} This battle group would be a mechanised force and consisted of Ratels, Casspirs and Buffels.

28.2 Order of Battle

28.2.1 South African and South West Africa Territorial Forces

- 101 Battalion
- elements - 1 Parachute Battalion
- elements - 5 Reconnaissance Regiment
- elements - 2 Reconnaissance Regiment

28.3 Battle

The attack occurred on 31 October 1987. The PLAN base, set in a dense wooded area, was attacked from the west by recce's and the parabats while 101 Battalion covered the base from north, east and south, the direction PLAN forces were expected to flee.^{[1]:252[2]:37} The fighting was said to be intense lasting seven hours with PLAN putting up a fight against the SADF.^{[1]:252[2]:37} The base was not taken and the SADF forces withdrew when PLAN reinforcements were said to be on their way.^{[1]:252}

28.4 Aftermath

The South African forces are said to have incurred 12 killed and 47 wounded,^{[1]:252} while other sources say it was as high as 19 killed and 64 wounded.^{[1]:489} On the SWAPO side, the casualties were said to be high too with at least 150 PLAN soldiers killed.^[2] **Honoris Crux** medals were awarded to five 101 Battalion members for gallantry in action.

28.5 Further reading

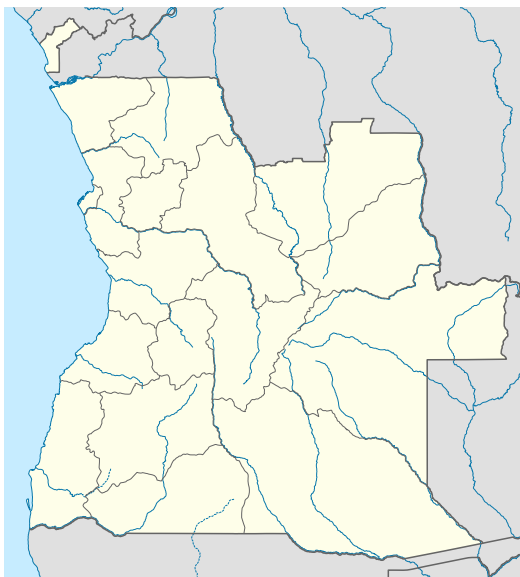
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Chapter 29

Operation Hooper



●
Cuito Cuanavale
Operation Hooper (Angola)

Operation Hooper was a military operation by the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the South African Border War. This operation forms part of what has come to be called the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale. The Cubans' objective was securing the town of Cuito Cuanavale on the west of the river from capture. The SADF objective was to drive the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) west across the river or to destroy them, so as to ensure that FAPLA was no longer a threat to the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in the south-east. The FAPLA advance was permanently halted, UNITA lived to fight on for another 15 years. The SADF never attempted to capture the town. Both sides claimed victory.

29.1 Background

Directly following on from Operation Modular, by November the SADF had cornered the remnants of three FAPLA units on the east of the Cuito River, across from the town itself and was poised to destroy them.^[1] The quite demoralised 59th FAPLA motorised infantry brigade, 21st and 25th FAPLA light infantry brigades, in positions near Tumpo and east of the Cuito River, were effectively cut off due to SADF artillery control of both the bridge and airstrip and to UNITA guerrilla control of the road from Menongue, which they had mined and were prepared to ambush.^{[2][3]}

With no functioning armour or artillery remaining, the FAPLA units faced annihilation.^[4] On 15 November, the

Angolan government requested urgent military assistance from Cuba.

On 25 November the UN Security Council demanded the SADF's unconditional withdrawal from Angola by 10 December but without threatening any sanctions.^[5]

29.2 Cuban objectives

In Castro's view, a South African victory would have meant not only the capture of Cuito and the destruction of the best Angolan military formations, but, quite probably, the end of Angola's existence as an independent country. Thus, Fidel Castro responded immediately by sending — in what was called "*Maniobra XXXI Aniversario de las FAR*" — materiel and 15 000 elite troops, retaking the initiative from the Soviets.^[3] The first Cuban reinforcements in Cuito arrived by helicopter on 5 December with about 160^[6]–200^[7] technicians, advisers, officers, and special forces.^[8]

General Arnaldo Ochoa, a veteran of the 1976 Angola campaign and of tank battles in Ethiopia, was made overall commander of the forces on the government side. Ochoa and Castro were to have serious disagreements in the conduct of the war in Angola. These tensions were to have repercussions both during the war where Castro's interference with defense plans may have cost the Cubans dozens of lives^[9] and in the aftermath of Angolan hostilities a year later when Ochoa was arrested, tried and executed by firing squad after being found guilty of treason.^[10] General Cintras Frias was made commander at Cuito Cuanavale. The Cubans' initial priority was securing Cuito Cuanavale, but while reinforcements were arriving at the besieged garrison they made preparations for a second front to the west of Cuito Cuanavale in Lubango where the SADF had been operating unhindered for 8 years.^{[11][12]}

29.3 South African objectives

Directly following on from Operation Modular, Operation Hooper's objective was defined as being to destroy the enemy east of the river or at least to drive them back across the river, inflicting maximum casualties but suffering minimum losses of their own. The river crossings were to be fortified and handed over to UNITA, and the SADF were to withdraw from Angola as soon as that was achieved. The order was that the town of Cuito Cuanavale would not be attacked unless it fell into SADF hands almost without a fight.^{[13][14]}

The SADF units received fresh troops and equipment, but the units were reduced to about 2000 men and 24 tanks for the rest of the operation. The new arrivals had to be acclimatised first. The SADF objective was defined as being to destroy the enemy east of the river or at least to drive them back across the river, inflicting maximum casualties but suffering minimum losses of their own. The river crossings were to be fortified and handed over to UNITA, and the SADF were to withdraw from Angola as soon as that was achieved. The order was that the town of Cuito Cuanavale would not be attacked unless it fell into SADF hands almost without a fight.^{[13][14]}

29.4 Engagement

The bombardment started on 2 January 1988, with a mix of artillery and air strikes, and a UNITA infantry attack that failed. On 3 January the SADF destroyed the important bridge across the Cuito River using a smart bomb.^[15] The Cubans managed to construct a wooden footbridge in its place which they baptised *Patria o Muerte* (fatherland or death).^[16] They partly buried disabled tanks so that their turrets could be used as fixed artillery pieces.^[17]

32 Battalion and elements of other units harried the road convoys for weeks, destroying several hundred tanks and other vehicles, and inflicting an unknown number of casualties.^[18]

On 13 January the SADF attacked the 21st brigade, starting with air strikes and artillery bombardments. Over two days the FAPLA unit was driven out of their positions, and lost 7 tanks with 5 more captured, various other vehicles destroyed and captured, and 150 men dead or captured. UNITA lost 4 dead and 18 wounded, and the SADF had one man wounded and one armoured vehicle damaged.^[19] However the SADF was again unable to exploit the momentum, due to a shortage of reserves and supplies. UNITA occupied the captured positions, and the SADF withdrew, but UNITA lost the positions later to a FAPLA counter-attack. A large Cuban and FAPLA column was on the way from Menongue for the relief of Cuito Cuanavale, but progress in the rainy season was slow due to the need to clear the UNITA minefields and guard against possible ambushes. They did not reach Cuito Cuanavale in time to take part in the first engagement.^[2]

The next attack was only on 14 February, against the positions of 21st brigade that UNITA had lost, and the neighbouring positions of the 59th brigade. They were counter-attacked by Cuban tanks. Both 21st brigade and 59th brigade were forced to withdraw. The FAPLA lost 500 men and a further 32 Cuban soldiers, along with 15 tanks and 11 armoured vehicles. The SADF had 4 killed and 11 wounded, plus some vehicles damaged.^[20] FAPLA withdrew to the Tumpo (river) triangle, a smaller area east of the river and across from Cuito Cuanavale. The terrain was ideally suited to defence, and they laid extensive minefields.

In a skirmish on 19 February a FAPLA position was disrupted, and it resulted in the FAPLA 59th brigade being withdrawn across the river. However the SADF had two vehicles damaged in the minefield. In the following days the Cubans stepped up their air attacks against South African positions. On 25 February another assault on the bridgehead ran into a minefield, and bogged down. FAPLA lost 172 men, plus 10 Cubans, and 6 tanks. The SADF lost 4 killed and 10 wounded, plus several vehicles damaged. However the bridgehead survived, and the objective of clearing all of the Angolans from the east side of the river had still not been achieved.^[21]

This concluded Operation Hooper. It was succeeded by the brief **Operation Packer**.

29.5 See also

- 32 Battalion (South Africa)
- Angolan Civil War/South African Border War
- List of operations of the South African Border War

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- [2] Niddrie (1988), p. 2.
- [3] Vanneman (1990), p. 79.
- [4] Bole-Richard (1988), *Le Monde's* Johannesburg correspondent reported that these units had been without resupply for three weeks. See also Benemelis (1988), cap. 18.
- [5] Gleijeses, Piero: *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (The University of North Carolina Press) quoting: Secretary of State to American Embassy, Pretoria, 5 December 1987, Freedom of Information Act
- [6] Bole-Richard (1988)
- [7] Ricardo Luis (1989), p. 6.
- [8] Barber, Simon in: Castro explains, why Angola lost battle against the SADF, 27 July 1989
- [9] George (2005), p. 218.
- [10] George (2005), p. 215.
- [11] Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1988), p. 59.
- [12] George (2005), pp. 210–212.
- [13] The SADF in the Border War, 1966-1989, by Leopold Scholtz, pg 316-319, 338-339
- [14] George (2005), p. 214.
- [15] The SADF in the Border War, 1966-1989, by Leopold Scholtz, pg 320-321
- [16] Ricardo Luis (1989)
- [17] Holt (2005), p. 84.
- [18] The SADF in the Border War, 1966-1989, by Leopold Scholtz, pg 334-337
- [19] The SADF in the Border War, 1966-1989, by Leopold Scholtz, pg 321-324
- [20] The SADF in the Border War, 1966-1989, by Leopold Scholtz, pg 332
- [21] The SADF in the Border War, 1966-1989, by Leopold Scholtz, pg 341-345

Chapter 30

Operation Packer

Operation Packer was a military operation by the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War from March to April 1988. This operation forms part of what became known as the **Battle of Cuito Cuanavale**. Operation Packer was a continuation of **Operation Hooper**, using fresh troops and equipment. The Cuban's objective was still to secure the town of Cuito Cuanavale to the west of the river from capture. The SADF objective was once again to eliminate the remaining Angolan forces on the east side of the river, so as to ensure that the Angolans were no longer a threat to UNITA in the south-east. Although at the conclusion some Angolan units remained in positions east of the river, the Angolan advance against UNITA was permanently halted, and UNITA lived to fight on. The SADF never attempted to cross the river or to capture the town. Both sides again claimed victory.

30.1 Background

On the 29 February 1988, the SADF and UNITA launched a fourth attack on the 25 Brigade in Tumpo triangle and the vital Cuito River Bridge. This attack would last until the evening of the 1 March.^{[1]:229} Due to problems with the clearing of the minefields in front of 25 Brigades positions, Cuban artillery and the mechanical failure of several SADF Ratels and Olifant tanks, the SADF could not reach the forward positions on schedule. The Cuban defense plan had worked and the SADF withdrew.^{[1]:229} By the 3 March, the SADF 20 Brigade, began its planned demobilisation and so ended Operation Hooper. **82 Mechanised Brigade** replaced the previous force and consisted mainly of Citizen (reservists) and Permanent Force soldiers.^{[1]:230}

The battle would take place on the 23 March with a diversionary attack from the south and the main attack of infantry, armour and UNITA from the north.^{[1]:232} The plan called for the destruction of the 25 Brigade and the demolition of the bridge over the Cuito River to the town of Cuito Cuanavale. UNITA would then occupy the old 25 Brigade positions and the SADF would then withdraw.

The Cubans and FAPLA strengthened the minefields in front of the 25 Brigade and positioned artillery on both side of the river banks to cover the potential attack routes the SADF might use for their eventual return.^{[1]:232} 13 Brigade and Cuban soldiers were based on the western side of the Cuito River to guard the town of Cuito Cuanavale.

30.2 Order of Battle

30.2.1 South African and South West Africa Territorial Forces^{[2]:350[3]:Ch11}

82 Mechanised Brigade - Colonel Paul Fouche

- two **Ratel-20** mechanized companies - Regiment Groot Karoo & Regiment de la Rey
- two **Olifant** tank squadron - Regiment President Steyn
- one **Ratel-90** anti-tank squadron - Regiment Mooirivier

- one G5 battery - Regiment Potchefstroom University
- one G2 battery - Regiment Potchefstroom University
- one 120mm mortar battery - 44 Parachute Brigade
- one MRL battery - 19 Rocket Regiment
- AA, engineer and reconnaissance (4 Reconnaissance Regiment) platoons
- three companies - 32 Battalion

30.2.2 UNITA

- 3rd Battalion
- 4th Battalion
- 5th Battalion
- two semi-regular battalions

30.2.3 FAPLA/Cuban forces

- 25th Brigade
- 13th Brigade
- 36th Brigade (one battalion)
- 29 tanks and numerous artillery units

30.3 Battle

After the SADF completed the last attack of Operation Hooper on 1 March, FAPLA and Cuban forces began aggressive patrols around 5 March into the minefields and land in front of their positions in the Tumpo triangle. This brought them into contact with UNITA forces patrolling the disputed land.^{[1]:232} On 9 March, Cuban MiGs bombed SADF supply lines around Lomba River. This was the route the SADF used to move their supplies from Mavinga to their positions east of the Chaminga high ground.^{[1]:232} In preparation for the main attack on the 25 Brigade, UNITA forces attacked and chased the FAPLA elements of 36 Brigade from the high ground north of the Tumpo triangle, between the Cuito and Cuanavale rivers.^{[3]:Ch11} The positions on the high ground were taken over by 20 March, establishing forward observers for the SADF artillery.^{[1]:232} Members of 4 Recce infiltrated the west bank of Cuito with the aim of identify targets for the SADF artillery batteries.^{[3]:Ch11} The South African artillery engaged many targets before the main battle and the Cuban artillery countered but were not as successful at hitting targets.^{[3]:Ch11} On 18 March, two portable ferries used to cross the Cuito River were destroyed by the SADF artillery.^{[1]:338[3]:Ch11} From 21 to the 22 March, UNITA conduct numerous hit-and-run attacks on FAPLA/Cuban positions around Cuito Cuanavale to confuse and keep them occupied.^{[1]:232}

SADF electronic warfare operations intercepted FAPLA communications on 22 March which indicated that FAPLA wanted to retake the Chaminga heights. These high grounds lay east in front of the Tumpo triangle and the SADF positions. SADF decided to go ahead with the operation planned for 23 March.^{[1]:232} On the night of 22 March, around 21h00, the SADF units began to line up and prepare for the attack, which would begin the next morning.^{[2]:353} As they moved forward during the night, the columns became temporarily lost and then had to continue their advance with only one tank de-miner when the other overturned. Around 04h00 on 23 March, SADF G-5 artillery began to bombard the forward positions of the 25 Brigade.^{[1]:232} By 06h00 the SADF attack column was within 10 km of the FAPLA positions but had soon stopped as they were delayed by bad terrain and one of the tanks had broken down.^{[2]:354} Once the repair was completed the attack resumed around 08h15.^{[1]:233} Not long after the attack column began moving again, a tank hit a mine and the de-miner tank sent forward to clear the minefield was itself permanently disabled by a mine, unable to be moved.^{[2]:354} The column halted and sappers were brought forward to clear a way through the minefield with their Ploffaders, an automated rocket-fired explosive de-miner.^{[2]:354} They failed to work

and they had to be manually detonated, which delayed the operation by three hours. Clearing of the minefields also attracted the attention of the Cuban artillery, which fired on the SADF column but was ineffective in hitting targets but slowed any progress they wished to make.^{[2]:354} During this time, UNITA fought a battle with elements of 38 Brigade on the high ground they captured earlier during the month, but they and the SADF forward observers were chased off it.^{[1]:233}

The SADF's main column resumed moving around 12h30 towards 25 Brigade's positions, but just over an hour later hit another minefield.^{[2]:354} This disabled three SADF tanks and again attracted the Cuban artillery. One of the tanks was able to be recovered while the other two remained stuck in the minefield.^{[2]:357} UNITA soldiers started to take casualties as they were being transported on the backs of the tanks and were exposed to this artillery fire.^{[1]:233} The South African commander moved his forces back out of the minefield as they attempted to retrieve the damaged tanks. By 14h30 a decision was made to withdraw altogether due to the minefields and heavy artillery attacks from both sides of the river.^{[2]:357} A request was made for the SADF artillery to destroy the three damaged Olifant tanks. This was rejected as it was believed that the tanks could be recovered.^{[2]:357} This did not happen; one was retrieved by the Cubans and taken to the town of Cuito Cunivale^{[1]:338} and the other two remain to this day in the Angolan bush.^[4]

30.4 Aftermath

It was soon realized that the SADF and UNITA would not be able to push the FAPLA/Cuban forces out of their Tumpo positions without taking serious casualties.^{[1]:234} The South African government had also ruled out an attack on Cuito Cuanavale from the west.^{[1]:234} Operation Packer thus came to an end on the 30 April 1988.^{[5]:247} 82 Brigade began to withdraw and was replaced with Battle Group 20.^{[1]:234} This battle group's objective was, with aid from UNITA, to build minefields between the Tumpo and Dala Rivers and mine other exits across the Cuito River,^{[1]:234} to prevent a further Angolan assault from Cuito Cuanavale towards Mavinga and to create the impression that the SADF were still entrenched in the area.^{[1]:234} This operation would take several months, and was part of **Operation Displace**.

The Cubans saw the failure of the SADF and UNITA to drive the Angolans from their positions as a defeat but in reality both sides had fought themselves to a stalemate.^{[1]:235} The Cubans and FAPLA were effectively in control of the same territory when the offensive first started in 1985, three years earlier.^{[6]:Chpt5} However the FAPLA attack against UNITA had been permanently halted, and the SADF objectives had been accomplished.^{[2]:345-350}

Direct action between the South Africans and Cubans would soon move to south-western Angola where a confrontation between the parties would result in **Operation Excite/Hilti**.

30.5 References

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Chapter 31

Operation Excite/Hilti

Operation Excite/Hilti (aka Operation Hilti and Operation Prone)^{[1]:249[2]} was a set of military operations by the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the Angolan Civil War and South African Border War.

31.1 Background

With a stalemate around Cuito Cuanavale in the south-eastern Angola, the Cuban interest moved to the far south-west. Fidel Castro developed a strategy to increase Cuban influence in the region and develop plans to push the Cuban forces as far as the South-West African/Namibian border.^{[3]:236}

On 11 March, the Cuban 40 Tank Brigade was moved as far as Tchibemba and with the goal of reinforcing the towns at Cahama, Xangongo, Mupa and Cuvelai that were currently garrisoned by the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) and SWAPO soldiers.^{[3]:236} At the same time there was a need to move aircraft, radar and air defences further south and this meant the construction and extensions of the existing airfields. This occurred at Cahama and Xangongo with the construction being completed by early to late June.^{[3]:237} These extensions and the expansion of radar and air defences brought about the end of SAAF air superiority in this region allowing Cuban aircraft to attack bases in SWA/Namibia if required.^{[3]:237}

This Cuban plan would clash with the interests of South Africa in the region. The South Africans had free rein in this region of Angola for a number of years and had been in control of the Calueque hydroelectric and irrigation scheme since 1975 that supplied energy and water to South-West Africa/Namibia.^{[3]:237}

31.2 Order of Battle

31.2.1 South African and South West Africa Territorial Forces

^{[1]:249[2]}

51 Battalion - Commandant Leon Lambrechts

- one company - 1 SWA Specialised Unit
- one company - 911 Battalion
- one company - 101 Battalion

61 Mechanised Infantry Battalion Group - Commandant Mike Muller

- two Ratel-20 mechanized companies
- one Armoured Car squadron
- one Ratel-90 anti-tank platoon

- one Olifant tank squadron
- one Ratel ZT3 troop
- one company - 1 Parachute Battalion

32 Battalion - Commandant Jan Hougard

- three companies - 32 Battalion
- one troop 20mm AA
- one company - 701 Battalion
- one company - 102 Battalion
- one company - 210 Battalion
- combat element - Sector 20
- three intelligence teams
- three 81-mm mortar sections - 32 Battalion
- two reconnaissance teams - 32 Battalion
- Eland armoured car squadron - Sector 20
- one troop G-1 88-mm artillery

10 Artillery Regiment - Commandant George Swanepoel

- one G-5 battery - S Battery
- one G-2 battery - K Battery
- one MRL troop
- one 120-mm mortar battery
- one meteorological section
- one 20-mm AA Ystervark troop

31.2.2 Cuban forces

31.3 Battles

With the Cuban movements southwards and continuing SADF/South West African Territorial Force operations against SWAPO in same area, both forces would soon come into contact with each other. On 18 April, a SWATF unit, 101 Battalion, chasing a SWAPO unit was ambushed by Cuban elements from Xangongo near Chipeque.^{[1]:249} The battle ended with the South Africans losing two men and eleven wounded.^{[3]:237} Thereafter the Cubans continued patrolling southwards from Xangongo towards the SADF garrison at Calueque.

On 2 May, SAAF Mirages attacked FAPLA positions south of Techipa.^{[3]:238} The Cubans retaliated fearing a South African advance and planned another ambush. During the first round tripartite talks in London on the 3 May, behind the scene talks between the military contingents of Cuba and South Africa was tense. The Cubans threatened to invade SWA/Namibia if the South Africans did not agree to the Cuban proposals while the South African indicated if they tried, it would be Cuba's darkest day.^{[3]:239} The talks ended the following day. The ambush site was in position by 4 May less than 2 km south of Donguena.^{[3]:238} A SADF unit, the 101 Battalion, with twenty Casspirs and two trucks had been sent forward to occupy Donguena. They ran into the ambush with Cubans destroying or damaging four Casspirs. The South Africans withdrew at dusk having lost seven men and one captured,^{[3]:238} Sergeant Johan Papenfus^{[4]:164} and failed to retrieve the fourth Casspir and its equipment. The Cubans were said to have lost forty

five soldiers.^{[3]:238} Later that evening, a further three companies from 201 and 101 Battalions were sent forward to capture Donguena, but with Cuban tank positions south of the town, withdrew.^{[3]:238} The Cuban later withdrew the same evening.

On 12 May, the 32 Battalion commander was called to a meeting in **Oshakati** to discuss a plan for the unit to attack SWAPO units at Techipa.^{[1]:249} The commander persuaded the planners to reconnoitre the area first before attacking. On 16 May, two reconnaissance units were airlifted to an area south of Techipa and while the second landed close to Xangongo but on the western side of the **Cunene River**.^{[1]:250} The first team was unable to get close to Techipa while the second team found tank tracks on all roads showing extensive patrolling of the area. The first team was sent back in from the north of Techipa by vehicle, finding extensive trench systems around the town reminiscent of the same layered system around Cuito with vehicles, generators and radar systems and outposts at further distances south of the town.^{[1]:250} A decision was then made to establish a new task force but it would only be in operation by early June, with a specific aim of protecting the water scheme at Calueque.^{[3]:241} In the mean time three companies of 32 Battalion would hold the line until the task force was operational and would continue to patrol and reconnoitre the area south of Techipa.^{[1]:251}

An ambush by 32 Battalion was planned for 22 May. The plan called for a mortar attack on an outpost south of Techipa which would draw out the Cubans who would be then ambushed.^{[3]:241} Members of 32 Battalion company ambushed a Cuban de-mining team before the mortaring began and then found themselves being attacked by four **BRDM-2** armoured personnel carriers and from two other hidden outposts.^{[1]:251} Fleeing back to the mortar position under covering mortar fire, the Cubans finally caught up and attacked with the BRDM's resulting in the abandonment of three damaged **Unimogs**.^{[1]:251} The 32 Battalion company retreated again as **BM-21s** started shelling. The Cubans eventually gave up the chase and the company was able to return to the mortar position in search of the missing vehicles but these had been removed by the Cubans.^{[1]:251} The remaining missing 32 Battalion members turned up at Ruacana and Calueque the following day.^{[1]:251}

Following the bungled ambush of the 22 May, the Cubans analysed the intelligence gathered from the captured SADF vehicles.^{[3]:242} Cuban intelligence concluded that the South African were planning a major attack on Techipa which was not the case. June was spent reinforcing the defences around Techipa which consisted of minefields, bunkers and anti-tank barriers which had been employed successfully to slow down the SADF and UNITA forces around Cuito Cuanavale during **Operation Packer**.^{[3]:242} There was also a build-up of Cuban forces around the town and aggressive patrolling by SWAPO and FAPLA forces to establish the positions of the South African forces. At the same time Castro planned an operation consisting of two parts.^{[3]:242} The first, a two pronged attack, one from Xangongo to capture Cuamato, then a three column advance from Techipa to capture Calueque joined later by the forces that had captured Cuamato.^{[3]:242} The second part of the plan was an air attack on Ruacana if Techipa was attacked by the **SAAF**. Castro also notified the Angolan and Soviets of his plan.^{[3]:242}

After a visit to SWA/Namibia, General **Jannie Geldenhuys** spoke to journalists on 8 June, announcing the Cubans build-up and their advance to the border region around Ruacana and the call-up of SADF conventional forces made up of citizen reserves.^{[4]:163} The call-up was said to be around 140,000 men and was hoped the announcement would send a message to the Cubans to end their advance to the SWA/Namibian border.^{[3]:242} By 13 June, the new SADF Task Force planned in May, was now in operation under the command of Colonel Mucho Delpont with SADF forces in place east of the Cunene River, south of Xangongo, and around Cuamato and Calueque.^{[1]:252} Other SADF forces were positioned west of the Cunene River, with placements around and to the north-west of Calueque and Ruacana.^{[1]:252} The task forces headquarters was based at Ruacana. On 18 June, G-2 and G-5 batteries were in position and ready for use by the Task Force.^{[1]:252} These were used to shell the Cuban positions.

On 22 June, a company from 32 Battalion clashed with a Cuban unit with tanks and infantry.^{[1]:253} They were able to break off contact with the Cubans after assistance from SADF artillery. On the 23 June, reconnaissance units and members of 32 Battalion spotted three Cuban columns moving southwards from Techipa towards Calueque, with this stop-start advance continuing until the 26 June.^{[4]:164} Meanwhile the Cubans and FAPLA forces advanced from Xangongo on 24 June, the first prong of their plan and attacked the SADF units at Cuamato.^{[1]:252} 201 Battalion^{[1]:252} with additional elements of Ratels and mortars^{[3]:243} stopped the advanced and occupation of the town and the Cubans retreated back to Xangongo. The South African lost a few vehicles and remained in the town.^{[1]:252} At the same time the Cubans, Angolan's and South Africans met in Cairo on 24 June for a second round of tripartite talks.^{[3]:243} The two day meeting was led by the Americans with a Soviet delegation in attendance. The meeting was fiery with the Soviets pulling the Cuban delegation back into line and all that was agreed was that the concept of linkage, a South African pull-out of Angola followed by the Cubans, was the only option for a future agreement.^{[3]:243}

By the 26 June, a 32 Battalion company was moved into position to provide early warning of the Cuban tanks and columns advancing from Techipa while 61 Mechanised Battalion was brought in behind them to intercept when required. Using their MRL's and artillery they hindered and slowed the Cuban advance.^{[4]:164} Four Ratel ZT3 anti-

tank missile units had also arrived at 61 Mechanised Battalion positions.^{[1]:252} That evening of the 26 June, SADF reconnaissance had discovered SA-6 launchers around Techipa. Using a ruse of releasing meteorological balloons with aluminium strips attached to them, the Cubans fired their SA-6's narrowing down their location for the SADF reconnaissance units, and the South African counterattacked with G-5 artillery destroying them and after four hours other Cuban artillery.^{[3]:244}

On the morning of the 27 June, the Cuban columns began to move again. Elements of 32 Battalion that were monitoring the column were unable to make contact with 61 Mechanised Battalion to warn them about the advancing Cubans.^{[4]:164} 61 Mechanised Battalion and their tanks begun moving at the same time to find a better position than the night lager and when advancing over a low ridge, ran into a forward Cuban units ambush.^{[4]:165} The leading Ratel was hit by a RPG and during the battle, four further Ratels were damaged losing one soldier and a further three wounded. 61 Mechanised called in artillery fire as Cuban reinforcements arrived to support the ambush unit.^{[3]:245} During the heavy fighting that followed the battalion destroyed a tank, a BTR-60, many trucks and inflicted heavy casualties on the Cuban infantry forcing them to withdraw.^{[4]:165} During the battle, 32 Battalion eventually made contact with 61 Mechanised, informing them that Cuban tanks were on their way. 61 Mechanised released their tanks and sent them to intercept the Cuban tanks.^{[4]:153} The SADF tanks made contact and after a half hour had stopped the advance destroying another T-55 tank, trucks and a BTR-60. The Cubans were forced to withdraw again.^{[4]:165} Spotting the advance of two Cuban columns Commandant Mike Muller withdrew his forces southwards towards Calueque attacking one column and then the other with G-5 artillery.^{[4]:165} Both columns were halted.

Around 1pm, twelve Cuban MiG-23's based at Lubango and Cahama, flew at tree height to Ruacana, were spotted by SADF units but were unable to signal an air attack fast enough as the planes turned and headed to attack the hydroelectric dam at Calueque.^{[3]:245[4]:165} Two bombed the bridge over the Cunene river and destroyed it, damaged the sluice gates while another two bombed the power plant and engine rooms. A fifth plane bombed the water irrigation pipeline to Ovambo, destroying it.^{[3]:245} One of those bombs from the fifth plane exploded between a Buffel and Eland 90 killing eleven SADF soldiers on ammunition escort duty.^{[4]:165} Two Cuban planes were hit by 20 mm AA guns and one crashed on its way back to its base in Angola.^{[3]:245}

The South African soldiers retreated back towards the SWA/Namibian border, crossing in the late afternoon.^{[3]:244[5]:453} As described above, the air attack part of the Cuban operation went ahead but their ground forces retreated back to Techipa after the clash.^{[3]:245}

31.4 Aftermath

Fearing an revenge attack by the SADF, the Cubans implemented plans that included possible attacks on SWA/Namibia itself.^{[3]:246} These plans were scrapped when no retaliation occurred from the South Africans. What followed the hostilities at Calueque was an undeclared ceasefire.^{[3]:246} The South African public were shocked by the deaths at Calueque^{[4]:165} and the government ordered a scaling back of operations.^{[3]:245} Battle Group 20 whom with UNITA, guarding the minefields east of the Cuito River across from Cuito Cuanavale, were ordered to withdraw personnel and equipment so as not to take casualties and prevent any further SADF personnel becoming a prisoner of war.^{[3]:245[5]:548} UNITA were informed with some regarding this withdrawal as an act of betrayal.^{[5]:548} Orders were to ensure no Cubans advance any further than where they were currently positioned.^{[5]:548} By 13 July, the Cubans and South African's were back at the negotiation table in New York.^{[3]:247} The eventual successful negotiations would lead to *Operation Displace*.

31.5 Further reading

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Chapter 32

Operation Prone

Operation Prone was a proposed military operation by the South African Defence Force (SADF) and South West African Territorial Force (SWATF) during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War between May and September 1988. With the advance of the 50th Cuban Division towards Calueque and the South-West Africa border, the SADF formed the 10 SA Division to counter this threat. The plan for Operation Prone had two phases. **Operation Linger** was to be a counterinsurgency phase and **Operation Pact** a conventional phase.

32.1 Background

Like all good battle plans, events on the ground caused well thought out plans to rapidly change and evolve and this was the case with the proposed SADF plan that came to be called Operation Prone. Caught off guard by the rapid movement southwards by the Cuban 10th Division, whose appearance was first noticed during April/May 1988 when SADF units in south-western Angola started to come into contact with advancing Cuban/FAPLA units, serious planning begun.^{[1]:702} Initially the plans were developed as a proposed attack on the Cuban/FAPLA forces in south-western Angola but as events on the ground changed and peace talks developed, the plans evolved to one of a defence of north-western South-West Africa.

32.1.1 South African threat assessment

The South Africans anticipated attacks from two or three fronts possibly from Cahama, Xangongo or Ondjiva towards Ruacana and Calueque.^{[1]:723} They believed that the Cubans response to any South African counterattack, could be attacks by Cuban forces on SADF bases at Rundu, Ruacana, Oshakati, Ondangwa and Grootfontein and could also involve SWAPO insurgents in the SADF rear during the attacks.^{[1]:724} The SADF's main conventional unit in SWA, 61 Mechanised Battalion was in a state of reorganisation and training after Operation Hooper.^{[1]:723} 32 Battalion and 101 Battalion were engaged in south-western Angola against SWAPO while the other main conventional unit, 4 SAI, was also reorganising in South Africa and would be combat ready in SWA by 25 July.^{[1]:725} The South African did not believe that Cuban/FAPLA forces in south-eastern Angola at Cuito Cuanavale would try and attack the UNITA's bases at Mavinga and Jamba. This meant Cuban/FAPLA forces would concentrate their efforts in south-western Angola.^{[1]:727}

32.2 Order of Battle

32.2.1 South African and South West Africa Territorial forces

10 SA Division (Operation Hilti/Prone) - Brigadier Chris Serfontein^{[1]:899}

HQ 10 SA Division - Oshakati

61 Mechanised Battalion incl. one tank squadron

4 SAI Battalion - no tank squadron

32 Battalion
101 Battalion
81 Armour Brigade

- Brigade HQ
- one tank regiment - 3 squadrons Pretoria Regiment
- one mechanized battalion - 1 Regiment Northern Transvaal
- one armoured car regiment - 2 Light Horse Regiment
- one field engineer regiment - 15 Field Regiment
- one anti-aircraft battery - Regiment Eastern Transvaal
- one engineer support squadron
- one signal unit - 81 Signal Regiment
- one maintenance unit - 20 Maintenance Unit
- one field workshop - 32 Field Regiment
- one medical battalion group - 6 Medical Battalion Group
- one provost platoon - 8 Provost Unit

71 Motorised Brigade

- HQ Cape Town Highlanders
- two mechanized infantry companies - Cape Town Highlanders Regiment
- one support weapons company - Cape Town Highlanders
- one armoured car regiment - Regiment Orange River
- one field engineer troop - 6 Field Engineer Regiment
- one signal troop - 7 Signal Group
- one maintenance platoon - 4 Maintenance Unit
- one medical battalion - 3 Medical Battalion
- one light workshop troop - 71 Field Regiment
- one provost platoon - 7 Provost Unit

Parachute Battalion Group

- three parachute companies
- one parachute support company
- one anti aircraft troop
- one engineer troop
- one signal troop
- one maintenance platoon
- one reconnaissance section
- one light workshop troop

- one provost platoon
- one medical team
- two mobile air operations teams

10 Artillery Brigade

- HQ 10 Artillery Brigade
- one G-5 battery - 4 SAI
- one G-5 battery - 61 Mechanised Battalion
- one G-2 battery - 17 Field Regiment
- one G-2 battery - Transvaal State Artillery
- one G-2 battery - 51 Battalion
- one MRL battery - 32 Battalion
- one MRL battery - 4 Artillery Regiment
- one 120 mm mortar battery - 4 Artillery Regiment
- one 120 mm mortar battery - 18 Light Artillery Regiment Parachute Brigade
- two meteorological sections

Reserves

- HQ elements from 71 Motorised Brigade
- HQ elements from 8 Armour Division
- HQ elements from 44 Parachute Brigade
- one G-5 battery - based in SE Angola
- one G-2 battery - 71 Motorised Brigade
- 8 Maintenance Unit
- 30 Corps Maintenance Unit
- two 32mm anti aircraft batteries
- one provost platoon

10 SA Division (Operation Prone) - Brigadier Chris Serfontein^{[1]:904}

Task Force X-ray - Colonel Leon Marais

- 53 Battalion
- 54 Battalion
- 4 SAI Battalion
- one combat wing - 101 Battalion
- 17 Field Regiment HQ
- one G5 battery - 4 SAI

- one G2 battery - 17 Field Regiment
- one MRL battery - 17 Field Regiment
- one AA battery - Regiment Vaal River

Task Force Zulu - Colonel Mucho Delport

- 51 Battalion
- 52 Battalion
- 102 Battalion
- 32 Battalion
- 61 Mechanised Battalion incl. one tank squadron
- one combat wing - 101 Battalion
- 14 Artillery Regiment HQ
- one G2 battery - Transvaal State Artillery Regiment
- one 35mm AA troop - Regiment Orange Free State
- two 20mm AA troops - Regiment Eastern Transvaal

Task Force Yankee - Colonel Jan Lusse

- HQ 81 Armour Brigade
- HQ 10 Artillery Brigade
- one tank regiment (less one tank squadron) - 81 Armour Brigade
- one mechanized infantry company - 81 Armour Brigade
- one armoured car squadron - Light Horse Regiment² Light Horse Regiment
- two armoured car squadrons - 1 & 2 **Special Service Battalion**
- one 120mm mortar battery - 4 Artillery Regiment

Task Force Whiskey

- all counter-insurgency units from Tsumeb/Grootfontein/Otavi

10 Artillery Regiment - Colonel Jean Lausberg

32.2.2 Cuban forces

50th Division^{[1]:722} - Brigadier General Patricio de la Guardia Font

- three special forces battalions - Cuban **SPETSNAZ**
- three tank battalions - Cuban tank regiment (105-110 tanks)
- one artillery regiment - Cuban regiment
- six infantry regiments - Cuban and Angolan soldiers (1500-2000 men each plus tanks)
- three raiding battalions - Cuban and SWAPO soldiers (200 Cuban + 250 SWAPO each)
- Missile air defence batteries, air force helicopters and aircraft

32.3 Clashes begin

With the Cuban movements southwards and continuing SADF/South West African Territorial Force operations against SWAPO in same area, both forces would soon come into contact with each other. On 18 April, a SWATF unit, 101 Battalion, chasing a SWAPO unit was ambushed by Cuban elements from Xangongo near **Chipeque**.^{[2]:249} The battle ended with the South Africans losing two men and eleven wounded.^{[3]:237} Thereafter the Cubans continued patrolling southwards from Xangongo towards the SADF garrison at Calueque.

On 2 May, SAAF **Mirages** attacked FAPLA positions south of Techipa.^{[3]:238} The Cubans, fearing a South African advance, retaliated and planned another ambush. During the first round tripartite talks in London on the 3 May, behind the scene talks between the military contingents of Cuba and South Africa was tense. The Cubans threatened to invade SWA/Namibia if the South Africans did not agree to the Cuban proposals while the South African indicated if they tried, it would be Cuba's darkest day.^{[3]:239} The talks ended the following day. The Cuban ambush site was in position by 4 May less than 2 km south of Donguena.^{[3]:238} A SADF unit, the 101 Battalion, with twenty **Casspirs** and two trucks had been sent forward to occupy Donguena. They ran into the ambush with Cubans destroying or damaging four Casspirs. The South Africans withdrew at dusk having lost seven men and one captured.^{[3]:238} Sergeant Johan Papenfus^{[4]:164} and failed to retrieve the fourth Casspir and its equipment. The Cubans were said to have lost forty five soldiers.^{[3]:238} Later that evening, a further three companies from 201 and 101 Battalions were sent forward to capture Donguena, but with Cuban tank positions south of the town, withdrew.^{[3]:238} The Cuban later withdrew the same evening.

On 12 May, the 32 Battalion commander was called to a meeting in Oshakati to discuss a plan for the unit to attack SWAPO units at Techipa.^{[2]:249} The commander persuaded the planners to reconnoitre the area first before attacking. On 16 May, two reconnaissance units were airlifted to an area south of Techipa and while the second landed close to Xangongo but on the western side of the **Cunene River**.^{[2]:250} The first team was unable to get close to Techipa while the second team found tank tracks on all roads showing extensive patrolling of the area. The first team was sent back in from the north of Techipa by vehicle, finding extensive trench systems around the town reminiscent of the same layered system around **Cuito Cuanavale** with vehicles, generators and radar systems and outposts at further distances south of the town.^{[2]:250} A decision was then made to establish a new task force but it would only be in operation by early June, with a specific aim of protecting the water scheme at Calueque.^{[3]:241} In the mean time three companies of 32 Battalion would hold the line until the task force was operational and would continue to patrol and reconnoitre the area south of Techipa.^{[2]:251}

An ambush by 32 Battalion was planned for 22 May. The plan called for a mortar attack on an outpost south of Techipa which would draw out the Cubans who would be then ambushed.^{[3]:241} Members of 32 Battalion company ambushed a Cuban de-mining team before the mortaring began and then found themselves being attacked by four **BRDM-2** armoured personnel carriers and from two other hidden outposts.^{[2]:251} Fleeing back to the mortar position under covering mortar fire, the Cubans finally caught up and attacked with the BRDM's resulting in the abandonment of three damaged **Unimogs**.^{[2]:251} The 32 Battalion company retreated again as **BM-21s** started shelling. The Cubans eventually gave up the chase and the company was able to return to the mortar position in search of the missing vehicles but these had been removed by the Cubans.^{[2]:251} The remaining missing 32 Battalion members turned up at Ruacana and Calueque the following day.^{[2]:251}

Following the bungled ambush of the 22 May, the Cubans analysed the intelligence gathered from the captured SADF vehicles.^{[3]:242} Cuban intelligence concluded that the South African were planning a major attack on Techipa which was not the case. June was spent reinforcing the defences around Techipa with consisted of minefields, bunkers and anti-tank barriers which had been employed successfully to slow down the SADF and UNITA forces around Cuito Cuanavale during **Operation Packer**.^{[3]:242} There was also a build-up of Cuban forces around the town and aggressive patrolling by SWAPO and FAPLA forces to establish the positions of the South African forces. At the same time Castro planned an operation consisting of two parts.^{[3]:242} The first, a two pronged attack, one from Xangongo to capture Cuamato, then a three column advance from Techipa to capture Calueque joined later by the forces that had captured Cuamato.^{[3]:242} The second part of the plan was an air attack on Ruacana if Techipa was attacked by the **SAAF**. Castro also notified the Angolan and Soviets of his plan.^{[3]:242}

32.4 10 SA Division formed

By the 27 May, Brigadier Chris Serfontein was appointed 10 SA Division commander while Colonel Roland de Vries was appointed his Chief of Staff.^{[1]:725-26} On the 30 May/1 June, operational instructions for Operation Hilti (to be renamed Operation Prone later) were released to the planners by SADF HQ. The instructions required the

development of a conventional and counter insurgency plan for north-west South-West Africa and south-western Angola.^{[1]:727} The instructions called for a sub-phase called Operation Excite to gain military control of south west Angola by August 1988.^{[1]:728} Following Operation Excite, Operation Faction, restoration of SADF influence over 21 days in the area of dispute.^{[1]:728} And finally Operation Florentine, the installation of UNITA in area of dispute and to support them against a FAPLA and Cuban attempts to retake the area.^{[1]:728} This plan would make use of the 10 SA Division, as well as elements of the airforce, the navy operating off the Angolan coast and the insertion of special forces deep in the FAPLA/Cuban rear.^{[1]:728-29}

To counter the immediate threat of the Cuban advance to the South-West African border, the 10 SA Division planning team moved to South-West Africa on the 7 June to the operational headquarters at Oshakati and worked on the plan until 17 June.^{[1]:736} Part of this plan would become **Operation Excite/Hilti**. After a visit to SWA/Namibia, General **Jannie Geldenhuys** spoke to journalists on 8 June, announcing the Cubans build-up and their advance to the border region around Ruacana and the call-up of SADF conventional forces made up of citizen reserves.^{[4]:163} The call-up was said to be around 140,000 men and was hoped the announcement would send a message to the Cubans to end their advance to the SWA/Namibian border.^{[3]:242} Call-up would begin on 21 July and be completed by 25 July with movement to SWA/Namibia taking place between the 26 and 31 July.^{[1]:732} Battle training would be completed by 21 August with the units ready to be deployed for action into Southern Angola by the 24 August.^{[1]:732}

32.5 Clashes continue

By 13 June, the new SADF Task Force planned in May, was now in operation under the command of Colonel Mucho Delport with SADF forces in place east of the Cunene River, south of Xangongo, and around Cuamato and Calueque.^{[2]:252} Other SADF forces were positioned west of the Cunene River, with placements around and to the north-west of Calueque and Ruacana.^{[2]:252} The task forces headquarters was based at Ruacana. On 18 June, G-2 and G-5 batteries were in position and ready for use by the Task Force.^{[2]:252} These were used to shell the Cuban positions. On 22 June, a company from 32 Battalion clashed with a Cuban unit with tanks and infantry.^{[2]:253} They were able to break off contact with the Cubans after assistance from SADF artillery. On the 23 June, reconnaissance units and members of 32 Battalion spotted three Cuban columns moving southwards from Techipa towards Calueque, with this stop-start advance continuing until the 26 June.^{[4]:164} Meanwhile the Cubans and FAPLA forces advanced from Xangongo on 24 June, the first prong of their plan and attacked the SADF units at Cuamato.^{[2]:252} 201 Battalion^{[2]:252} with additional elements of Ratels and mortars^{[3]:243} stopped the advanced and occupation of the town and the Cubans retreated back to Xangongo. The South African lost a few vehicles and remained in the town.^{[2]:252} At the same time the Cubans, Angolan's and South Africans met in Cairo on 24 June for a second round of tripartite talks.^{[3]:243} The two day meeting was led by the Americans with a Soviet delegation in attendance. The meeting was fiery with the Soviets pulling the Cuban delegation back into line and all that was agreed was that the concept of linkage, a South African pull-out of Angola followed by the Cubans, was the only option for a future agreement.^{[3]:243}

32.6 Operation Excite

By the 26 June, a 32 Battalion company was moved into position to provide early warning of the Cuban tanks and columns advancing from Techipa while 61 Mechanised Battalion was brought in behind them to intercept when required. Using their MRL's and artillery they hindered and slowed the Cuban advance.^{[4]:164} Four Ratel ZT3 anti-tank missile units had also arrived at 61 Mechanised Battalion positions.^{[2]:252} That evening of the 26 June, SADF reconnaissance had discovered SA-6 launchers around Techipa. Using a ruse of releasing meteorological balloons with aluminium strips attached to them, the Cubans fired their SA-6's narrowing down their location for the SADF reconnaissance units, and the South African counterattacked with G-5 artillery destroying them and after four hours other Cuban artillery.^{[3]:244}

On the morning of the 27 June, the Cuban columns began to move again. Elements of 32 Battalion that were monitoring the column were unable to make contact with 61 Mechanised Battalion to warn them about the advancing Cubans.^{[4]:164} 61 Mechanised Battalion and their tanks begun moving at the same time to find a better position than the night lager and when advancing over a low ridge, ran into a forward Cuban units ambush.^{[4]:165} The leading Ratel was hit by a RPG and during the battle, four further Ratels were damaged losing one soldier and a further three wounded. 61 Mechanised called in artillery fire as Cuban reinforcements arrived to support the ambush unit.^{[3]:245} During the heavy fighting that followed the battalion destroyed a tank, a **BTR-60**, many trucks and inflicted heavy casualties on the Cuban infantry forcing them to withdraw.^{[4]:165} During the battle, 32 Battalion eventually made

contact with 61 Mechanised, informing them that Cuban tanks were on their way. 61 Mechanised released their tanks and sent them to intercept the Cuban tanks.^{[4]:153} The SADF tanks made contact and after a half hour had stopped the advance destroying another T-55 tank, trucks and a BTR-60. The Cubans were forced to withdraw again.^{[4]:165} Spotting the advance of two Cuban columns Commandant Mike Muller withdrew his forces southwards towards Calueque attacking one column and then the other with G-5 artillery.^{[4]:165} Both columns were halted.

Around 1pm, twelve Cuban MiG-23's based at Lubango and Cahama, flew at tree height to Ruacana, were spotted by SADF units but were unable to signal an air attack fast enough as the planes turned and headed to attack the hydroelectric dam at Calueque.^{[3]:245[4]:165} Two bombed the bridge over the Cunene river and destroyed it, damaged the sluice gates while another two bombed the power plant and engine rooms. A fifth plane bombed the water irrigation pipeline to Ovambo, destroying it.^{[3]:245} One of those bombs from the fifth plane exploded between a Buffel and Eland 90 killing eleven SADF soldiers on ammunition escort duty.^{[4]:165} Two Cuban planes were hit by 20 mm AA guns and one crashed on its way back to its base in Angola.^{[3]:245}

The South African soldiers retreated back towards the SWA/Namibian border, crossing in the late afternoon.^{[3]:244[5]:453} As described above, the air attack part of the Cuban operation went ahead but their ground forces retreated back to Techipa after the clash.^{[3]:245}

32.7 Undeclared peace

Fearing an revenge attack by the SADF, the Cubans implemented plans that included possible attacks on SWA/Namibia itself.^{[3]:246} These plans were scrapped when no retaliation occurred from the South Africans. What followed the hostilities at Calueque was an undeclared ceasefire.^{[3]:246} The South African public were shocked by the deaths at Calueque^{[4]:165} and the government ordered a scaling back of operations.^{[3]:245} Battle Group 20 whom with UNITA, guarding the minefields east of the Cuito River across from Cuito Cuanavale, were ordered to withdraw personnel and equipment so as not to take casualties and prevent any further SADF personnel becoming a prisoner of war.^{[3]:245[5]:548} UNITA were informed with some regarding this withdrawal as an act of betrayal.^{[5]:548} Orders were to ensure no Cubans advance any further than where they were currently positioned.^{[5]:548} By 10 July, the Cubans and South African's were back at the negotiation table in New York for three days.^{[3]:247} The Cubans surprised the South African delegation by proposing an honourable Cuban withdrawal from Angola linked to the implementation of UN Resolution 435 and the ending of support to SWAPO and UNITA.^{[3]:247} This proposal became known as the New York Principle though the detail in the proposal would be negotiated at a later date.^{[3]:248} The parties met again in the Cape Verde on the 22 July for a fourth round of talks but all that was agreed was the proposal to set up a Joint Monitoring Commission.^{[3]:248}

32.8 Modified planning

Following the clashes at the end of June, the South African politicians and the military re-evaluated the SADF's role in the operational area. What was considered was the change in the military balance brought about by the Cuban division, the reluctance of the South African public to accept high casualties, the political direction towards the ending of Apartheid, and the international push to end South Africa's control of SWA/Namibia.^{[1]:742} On 19 July planning was finalised and Operation Hilti was changed to Operation Prone and the new plan became the defence of SWA/Namibia.^{[1]:743} It was divided into sub-operations, Operation Linger and Operation Faction (renamed Operation Pact). Operation Linger became the counterinsurgency plan against SWAPO incursions in SWA and bases in Angola.^{[1]:745} Operation Faction (Pact) was the conventional plan that would defend SWA against a Cuban invasion across the border and the destruction of the remainder of the enemy in Angola with a possible offensive action.^{[1]:745}

Operation Pact was divided into three phases. The first phase was to deceive the Cubans as to the intentions and disposition of the South African forces, the preparation of the SADF forces, assist in countering any SWAPO raids, and use of the recess to track the movement and disposition of the Cuban forces.^{[1]:748} Phase two, would occur when the Cubans invaded SWA/Namibia, drawing them into areas of SADF control, halting and destroying the Cubans.^{[1]:748} The third phase would occur if phase two failed, a delaying retreat by SADF forces to an area around Tsumeb and the final destruction of the remaining Cuban forces.^{[1]:749}

32.8.1 Airborne assault plan

A plan was drawn up for an attack on the Angolan port of **Namibe**.^{[1]:751} This port was the main logistical entrance for Cuban and FAPLA supplies to the Cuban 50th Division. The plan was developed by Commandant **McGill Alexander** of **44 Parachute Brigade**, a veteran of **Operation Reindeer**.^{[1]:751} The operation would last 72 hours with the objective being the destruction of the ports logistical capacity; the harbour and railway facilities and the railway line.^{[6]:394} The SADF would make use of the navy, airforce, paratroopers and special forces. The planned call for approximately 1200 men, half as an airborne drop and the rest by means of an amphibious assault backed by navy strike craft.^{[6]:394} The plan was tested during Exercise Magersfontein at **Walvis Bay**.^{[6]:394}

32.9 Peace talks

Round five of the Tripartite talks began on 2 August 1988 in **Geneva, Switzerland**. The Soviets joined the meeting in an observer role. The South Africans opened the negotiations with several proposals: a ceasefire to begin on 10 August 1988, redeployment of South African and Cuban forces in Angola by 1 September 1988, implementation of UN Resolution 435 and all foreign forces leave Angola by 1 June 1989.^{[3]:249} The 1 June 1989 proposal angered the Cuban and Angolans and the talks continued discussing the first three South African proposals. With the assistance of the Soviets, the Americans were able to get the Cubans, Angolans and South Africans to sign the Geneva Protocol on 5 August 1988. The protocol set the following dates:^{[3]:249}

- 10 August 1988 – South Africans to begin withdrawal from Angola
- 1 September 1988 – South Africans complete the withdrawal
- 10 September 1988 – Peace settlement signed
- 1 November 1988 – Implementation of UN Resolution 435

What was not agreed upon was Cuban withdrawal from Angola. This would be negotiated at another meeting in the near future. Nor were **SWAPO** or **UNITA** party to the agreement.

32.10 Ceasefire

On 8 August, the South Africans, Angolans and Cubans announced a ceasefire in Angola and SWA/Namibia.^[7] A line was drawn from Chitado, Ruacana, Calueque, Naulili, Cuamato and Chitado that the Cubans would stay north of and would guarantee the water irrigation supply from Ruacana to SWA/Namibia.^{[4]:166} **SWAPO**, not party to the agreement, said it would honour the ceasefire on 1 September^[7] if South Africa did so, but this did not happen and **SWAPO** activities continued.^{[4]:174} **UNITA** on the other hand stated that it would ignore the ceasefire and would continue to fight the Angolan government. It did however state that it wished to stop fighting if the Angolan government held talks with them or ceased attacking them and seek national reconciliation.^[7]

32.11 South African withdrawal from Angola

10 August saw the South African government announce the beginnings of a troop withdrawal from southern Angola,^[8] with the final day for withdrawal of SADF personnel set for 1 September. Battle Group 20, the only SADF force in south-eastern Angola, had been assisting **UNITA** to maintain the siege of **Cuito Cuanavale** after the end of **Operation Packer**. This withdrawal by Battle Group 20 southwards was part of **Operation Displace**. By 16 August the Joint Monitoring Commission was formed at Ruacana.^[8] This Joint Monitoring Commission finalised the terms of the ceasefire by the 22 August and the formal ceasefire was signed between three parties.^{[4]:170} Major General Willie Meyer represented South Africa, General Leopoldo Frias from Cuba and Angola by Colonel Antonio Jose.^{[1]:759} The SADF elements arrived at the Angolan/SWA/Namibian border with ten days to spare and had to wait around as the Joint Monitoring Commission and world media organised themselves for the crossover at **Rundu** at a temporary steel bridge that was to take place on 1 September.^{[5]:549} On 30 August 1988, the last of the South African troops crossed a temporary steel bridge into SWA/Namibia watched by the world's media and the Joint Monitoring Commission,

36 hours early than the planned time.^{[4]:170[8]} A convoy of fifty vehicles with around thousand soldiers crossed over singing battle songs.^[8] After officers of the three countries walked across the bridge, the South African sappers begun to dismantle the temporary steel bridge.^[8] The Joint Monitoring Commission then declared on 30 August 1988, that the South African Defence Force had now left Angola.^{[3]:250}

32.12 Aftermath

On the 1 September 1988, the SADF disbanded the 10 SA Division and the Citizen Force units were returned to South Africa.^{[1]:761} Planning however continued for Operation Prone in case further peace negotiation's failed to agree to the linkage of the implementation of UN Resolution 435 to the Cuban withdrawal from Angola.^{[1]:761} Nine more rounds of negotiations followed revolving around the dates for the Cuban withdrawal from Angola that finally ended with an agreement called the **Tripartite Accord** signed on 22 December in New York. This accord finalised the dates of the Cuban staggered withdrawals from Angola and the implementation of UN Resolution 435 on 1 April 1989.^{[3]:255}

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Chapter 33

Operation Displace

Operation Displace was a military operation by the South African Defence Force during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War. It involved maintaining the illusion that the SADF had remained in brigade strength east of **Cuito Cuanavale** at the end of April 1988 and the eventual withdrawal of all South African military units from south-eastern **Angola** during August 1988.

33.1 Background

Following the end fighting on 27 June 1988 around **Techipa** and **Calueque**, also known as **Operation Excite/Hilti**, an undeclared ceasefire came into being. The Americans under **Chester Crocker**, eager to prevent further fighting, negotiated a third round of talks in New York City to begin on 10 July. With Soviet assistance, the Cuban delegation returned with a less belligerent leader who proposed to the South Africans a Cuban withdrawal linked with the implementation of **UN Resolution 435**.^{[1]:247} This new concession came after seven years of rejecting that position. The talks ended on 13 July 1988, resulting in a document called the New York Principles which set out the negotiating points for future rounds. These included implementation of UN Resolution 435, SWA/Namibian independence and the Cuban withdrawal from Angola.^{[1]:248}

The fourth round of talks began on 22 July 1988 in **Sal, Cape Verde**.^{[1]:248} It lasted two days with the talks centring around the size and location of the military forces in Angola. Nothing more was achieved except a commitment to set up a Joint Monitoring Commission when the South Africans and Cubans decide to withdraw.^{[1]:248}

Round five began on 2 August 1988 in **Geneva**, Switzerland. The Soviets joined the meeting in an observer role. The South Africans opened the negotiations with several proposals: a ceasefire to begin on 10 August 1988, redeployment of South African and Cuban forces in Angola by 1 September 1988, implementation of UN Resolution 435 and all foreign forces leave Angola by 1 June 1989.^{[1]:249} The 1 June 1989 proposal angered the Cuban and Angolans and the talks continued discussing the first three South African proposals. With the assistance of the Soviets, the American were able to get the Cubans, Angolans and South Africans to sign the Geneva Protocol on 5 August 1988. The protocol set the following dates:^{[1]:249}

- 10 August 1988 – South Africans to begin withdrawal from Angola
- 1 September 1988 – South Africans complete the withdrawal
- 10 September 1988 – Peace settlement signed
- 1 November 1988 – Implementation of UN Resolution 435

What was not agreed upon was Cuban withdrawal from Angola. This would be negotiated at another meeting in the near future. Nor were **SWAPO** or **UNITA** party to the agreement.

33.2 Order of Battle

33.2.1 South African and South West Africa Territorial Forces

Combat Group 20 – Commandant Piet Nel

- one company – 101 Battalion
- one anti tank squadron – 32 Battalion
- one G-5 battery
- one MRL Valkiri battery
- two Combat Engineer troops

33.3 Operation

By the end of March 1988, it was soon realized that the SADF and UNITA would not be able to push the FAPLA/Cuban forces out of their Tumpo positions without taking serious casualties.^{[1]:234} The South African government had also ruled out an attack on Cuito Cuanavale from the west.^{[1]:234} Operation Packer thus came to an end on the 30 April 1988.^{[2]:247} 82 Brigade began to withdraw and was replaced with Battle Group 20.^{[1]:234} This battle group's objective was, with aid from UNITA, to build minefields between the Tumpo and Dala Rivers and mine other exits across the Cuito River,^{[1]:234} to prevent a further Angolan assault from Cuito Cuanavale towards Mavinga and to create the impression that the SADF were still entrenched in the area.^{[1]:234} This operation would take several months.

After the battle at Techipa on 27 June and the subsequent South African public uproar over the deaths of the twelve SADF soldiers on the same day, the SA government decided to scale back operations in southern Angola and an undeclared ceasefire came into being.^{[1]:246} SADF soldiers in southwestern Angola were moved back to Calueque^{[3]:165} and Ruacana with some movement back into SWA/Namibia while in southeastern Angola, Battle Group 20, which was helping to maintain the siege of Cuito Cuanavale with UNITA, was ordered to maintain a position by which no more casualties or loss of equipment could be sustained.^{[4]:548} Meanwhile 10 SA Division was formed on the SWA/Namibia border with Angola which would defend against any potential Cuban invasion of South West Africa.^{[1]:245} This forced stayed in position until the end of the year.

On 8 August, the South Africans, Angolans and Cubans announced a ceasefire in Angola and SWA/Namibia.^[5] A line was drawn from Chitado, Ruacana, Calueque, Naulili, Cuamato and Chitado that the Cubans would stay north of and would guarantee the water irrigation supply from Ruacana to SWA/Namibia.^{[3]:166} SWAPO, not party to the agreement, said it would honour the ceasefire on 1 September^[5] if South Africa did so, but this did not happen and SWAPO activities continued.^{[3]:174} UNITA on the other hand stated that it would ignore the ceasefire and would continue to fight the Angolan government. It did however state that it wished to stop fighting if the Angolan government held talks with them or ceased attacking them and seek national reconciliation.^[5]

10 August saw the South African government announce the beginnings of a troop withdrawal from southern Angola, with the final day for withdrawal of SADF personnel set for 1 September.^[6] When the Battle Group 20 commander notified the UNITA commander that they had been ordered southwards, the commander sought clarification from his headquarters. It is said that some of the UNITA soldiers cried as the SADF left their positions southeast of Cuito Cuanavale and believed they had been betrayed.^{[4]:548} The SADF elements arrived at the Angolan/SWA/Namibian border with ten days to spare and had to wait around as the Joint Monitoring Commission and world media organised themselves for the crossover at Rundu at a temporary steel bridge that was to take place on 1 September.^{[4]:549}

By 16 August the Joint Monitoring Commission was formed.^[7] This Joint Monitoring Commission met on 22 August at Ruacana and the formal ceasefire was signed between three parties.^{[3]:170} On 30 August 1988, the last of the South African troops crossed the temporary steel bridge into SWA/Namibia watched by the world's media and the Joint Monitoring Commission, 36 hours early than the planned time.^{[3]:170[7]} A convoy of fifty vehicles with around thousand soldiers crossed over singing battle songs.^[7] After officers of the three countries walked across the bridge, the South African sappers begun to dismantle the temporary steel bridge.^[7]

33.4 Aftermath

The Joint Monitoring Commission then declared on 30 August 1988, that the South African Defence Force had now left Angola.^{[1]:250} What followed were nine more rounds of negotiations revolving around the dates for the Cuban

withdrawal from Angola that finally ended with an agreement called the **Tripartite Accord** signed on 22 December in New York. This accord finalised the dates of the Cuban staggered withdrawals from Angola and the implementation of UN Resolution 435 on 1 April 1989.^{[1]:255}

33.5 See also

- **Tripartite Accord (Angola)**

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Chapter 34

Operation Merlyn

Operation Merlyn (aka The Nine Day War) was a military operation by the South African Defence Force (SADF), South West African Territorial Force (SWATF) and South West African Police (SWAPOL) during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War in April 1989. The aim of the operation was to prevent the incursion of PLAN (SWAPO) insurgents into South West Africa/Namibia from bases in Angola. These incursions were in violation of a ceasefire which came into effect on 1 April 1989 via the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 435 and the Tripartite Accord. Initially these PLAN incursions were tackled by South West African police units and eventually by SADF and SWATF units, released to assist the police having been confined to their bases by the peace agreements. These incursions and the conflict that resulted, ended after hastily arranged talks resulted in the Mount Etjo Declaration and an eventual ceasefire.

34.1 Background

On 22 December 1988, at the United Nations (UN) in New York, the South African, Cuban and Angolan government representatives met to sign the New York Accords better known as the Tripartite Accords.^{[1]:254} This represented the end of twelve rounds of negotiations between three parties which had started on 3 May 1988, chaired by the American representative Chester Crocker and attended by officials from the Soviet Union.^{[1]:230} The end of twelve rounds of negotiations saw an agreement that linked the implementation of United Nations Council Resolution 435 with the withdrawal of all Cuban soldiers from Angola.^{[1]:255} The agreement saw the initial withdrawal of 3000 Cuban soldiers followed by movement of troops further north in Angola, then staggered withdrawals from Angola resulting in all troops gone by 1 July 1991.^{[1]:255} The date for the implementation UN Resolution 435 was the 1 April 1989.^{[1]:255} The agreement did not however end the conflict between two Angolan adversaries in the Angolan Civil War, the MPLA and UNITA.^{[1]:255} United Nations verification of the Cuban withdrawal and the creation of a Joint Monitoring Commission was also agreed too. The UN created a timetable of actions over seven months required by all parties leading up to 1 April and beyond. SADF forces were to be reduced to 12000 men by six weeks before the 1 April and confined to two bases in SWA/Namibia before being reduced to 1500 men twelve weeks later.^[2] SWATF and the area-forces were to be demobilised and their arms and ammunition placed under guard.^[2] PLAN forces were also to remain confined to their bases from the 1 April.^[2] Law and order would remain with SWA Police with UNTAG international police members monitoring their impartiality.^[2] UNTAG's military component was only set to arrive at the end April beginning of May and they would monitor both the SADF and PLAN.^[2] By the 14 March 1989, the UN Secretary General sent letters to the South African's and SWAPO proposing that on 1 April at 04h00, a ceasefire and the end of cross border movements into and out of Namibia, would come into being.^[2] The Secretary General's proposal was agreed too by SWAPO on 18 March and 21 March by the South African government.^[2]

34.2 Order of Battle

34.2.1 South African and South West Africa Territorial forces

- South West African Police and Koevoet
- 101 Battalion

- 102 Battalion
- elements 61 Mechanised Battalion
- Other Area Force units
- SAAF helicopters

34.2.2 PLAN/SWAPO forces

- 1500 - 1800 insurgents

34.3 SWAPO border violations begin

On the 31 March, **Marti Ahtisaari**, UN Special Representative to UNTAG arrived in Windhoek and a dinner was held that night by the South African Administrator for SWA, **Louis Pienaar**, the night before the implementation of UN Resolution 435.^{[3]:428[2]} Present were SWA officials, South African government ministers, **United Nations** officials and the commander of **United Nations Transition Assistance Group** (UNTAG).^{[3]:428} The South African Foreign Minister **Pik Botha** informed Marti Ahtisaari that South African Military Intelligence had been monitoring the presence of 500-700 PLAN soldiers north of the South West African (SWA) border and that 150 PLAN insurgents had already crossed the border contrary to the New York Agreement of 1988, which stipulated that PLAN remain in Angola, north of the 16th parallel.^{[3]:428} The PLAN insurgents were said to be heavily armed and in uniform.^[2] Marti Ahtisaari did not believe SWAPO would violate the treaty and therefore did not believe Pik Botha's briefing, but still informed the UN Secretary General of the allegations.^{[3]:428}

34.4 Clashes occur

On the night of 31 March / 1 April a thousand PLAN insurgents were stationed just north of the border.^{[4]:180} They carried personal weapons and heavy arms in the form of SAM-7's, mortars and RPG-7's and infiltrated at a number of places over 300 km apart. Some entered near Ruacana and other around Ombalantu eventually widening to a 300 km front.^{[4]:180} SWA Police units had been patrolling the border area since January and made first contact with a PLAN unit around 6am on 1 April.^{[4]:181} Thirty PLAN insurgents and two policemen died in that first contact.^{[4]:181} As more and more contacts took place and fierce fighting begun, the SWA Police units realised that a major incursion was underway.^{[4]:181} Initially the South African Air Force (SAAF) **Alouette** helicopter gunships stood by helplessly and watched the SWAPOL units come under attack but their orders would soon change and they would be rearmed.^{[5]:Chp16} The policemen were also under armed, their vehicles had their heavy weapons removed as part of the ceasefire, and only had their light weapons to defend themselves.^{[3]:429} Foreign Minister Pik Botha phoned Secretary General **Perez de Cuellar** to inform him that SWAPOL could not prevent the incursions and if UNTAG could not contain the situation, the confined SADF units would be released from the their bases.^[2] Marti Ahtisaari reluctantly agreed to release a limited number of SADF units after UNTAG members flew into border zone and confirmed the incursions by PLAN insurgents, a decision which he would be criticised for later.^{[4]:181} 101 Battalion was the first unit to have its troops recalled and rearmed.^{[4]:182} 102 Battalion, SAAF helicopter gunships and 61 Mechanised Battalion's Ratel-90's would soon follow.^{[3]:432}

By 2 April, UNTAG officials were able to interview two PLAN insurgents that had been captured the day before and would be presented to the media the following day.^{[2][4]:182} They informed the UNTAG officials that they had been instructed by their commanders to enter SWA/Namibia, avoid South African security forces and set up bases which were to be under UN management.^[2] SWAPO said meanwhile, it had not violated the ceasefire and that its personnel were already based in Namibia, had been attacked and wanted to hand their weapons over to UNTAG, while the South African government maintained that the PLAN was continuing to cross the border.^[2] At the end of 2 April, the death toll stood at 130 PLAN insurgents and 10 SWA policemen.^{[4]:181}

The UN Secretary General addressed the **Security Council** on 3 April concluding that SWAPO had infiltrated across the border violating the ceasefire but that their intention was to surrender to UNTAG, even though SWAPO maintained their previous argument that no infiltration had taken place, he urged restraint by both parties and the implementation of all agreements.^[2] The two captured PLAN solidiers that were interviewed by UNTAG on 2 April were presented to the press for interviews on 3 April.^{[4]:182}

By 4 April the death toll stood at 172 PLAN insurgents and 21 SWA policemen.^{[4]:182} The South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha stated to the Secretary-General, that more than 1000 PLAN insurgents had crossed into SWA/Namibia, with more PLAN forces based on the border and were ready to cross.^[2] He said unless something was done now, the peace agreements could collapse.^[2]

On the 5 April, the UN Secretary General proposed a ceasefire to SWAPO and the South African government. The details proposed the setting up of assembly points for PLAN insurgents to gather at and then returned to Angola or disarmed allowed to go to their homes in SWA/Namibia.^[2] Within in 48 hours of the ceasefire, SADF and SWATF members would be returned and confined to their bases.^[2] Pik Botha, South African Foreign Minister, informed the UN Secretary General that PLAN insurgents were being notified by radio to return to Angola with safe passage to areas north of 16th Parallel, which was the agreement prior to the 1 April.^[2]

On 6 April the death toll stood at 179 PLAN insurgents and 22 SWA policemen and 1 SADF/SWATF soldier.^{[4]:183} An emergency summit of African Front-line States, on the same day, agreed with the UN Secretary General's ceasefire proposal, but requested that the PLAN insurgents remain at the assembly points until the SWAPO leadership themselves return to SWA/Namibia.^[2] By 7 April, UN member countries began to increase their efforts to speed up the arrival of UNTAG forces in Namibia.^[2] The UN Secretary General's 5 April proposed ceasefire, with the SADF/SWATF members confined to bases with 48 hours, was rejected by South Africans as it failed to take account of all existing agreements, the PLAN insurgents were supposed to be beyond the 16th Parallel.^[2] PLAN insurgents continued to stream across the border and the SADF security forces encountered two groups close to Oshakati, one containing 200 insurgents in trenches.^{[4]:183} The death toll at the end of the day stood at 253 PLAN insurgents and 26 policemen and SADF/SWATF members.^{[4]:183}

34.5 Mt Etjo Declaration

8 April saw Sam Nujoma announce that SWAPO had instructed PLAN insurgents in SWA/Namibia to stop fighting and regroup to withdraw under UNTAG escort to Angola. This would occur in 72 hours.^[2] At the same time, the South African government temporarily stopped the implementation of Resolution 435 and reintroduced curfew in the border area and reactivated the area force units.^{[4]:183} On the same day, the Joint Monitoring Commission made up of the South African, Cuban and Angolan representatives met at a game ranch at Mount Etjo, with American and Soviet observers.^{[4]:183} The UN Namibian representatives were invited on the 9 April. By the end of this day, 261 PLAN insurgents had died.^{[4]:183}

The 9 April resulted in Mount Etjo Declaration which had been agreed to by all those parties present.^[2] The declaration stated that all parties agreed to the existing peace agreements and that PLAN insurgents withdraw to nine border assembly points maintained by UNITAG forces, to be in place by 11 April, and then transported to places above the 16th Parallel in Angola.^{[4]:183} PLAN insurgents would be given a weeks grace to arrive at these assembly points while South African forces would not attack unless they were attacked first.^{[4]:183} Only a few arrived at these points with most choosing to cross the border on their own, not trusting the declaration and more PLAN insurgents would die because of this.^{[4]:183[2]}

34.6 SADF/SWATF reconfined to bases

At a meeting of the Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC) in northern Namibia on 20 April, it was agreed to return SADF and SWATF units to their bases in seven days.^[2] On 26 April, that agreement was implemented and SADF & SWATF units were confined to their bases for three days to allow PLAN insurgents to leave Namibia and return to Angola.^{[4]:184} A goodwill gesture by the South Africans on 26 April saw the release of 34 captured PLAN insurgents but 289 had been killed by this stage and 27 SWAPOL, SWATF and SADF members had died.^{[4]:184} In Cape Town, at a meeting from 27 to 29 April, of South African, Cuban and Angolan representatives, the 13 May was the agreed date when SADF and SWATF units would be confined to bases though this was not entirely acceptable to the UN Secretary General.^{[4]:184[2]}

34.7 SADF/SWATF forces released again

On 29 April, 200-400 PLAN insurgents were said to remain in Ovamboland and the South African forces were again released from their base with more PLAN insurgents killed after 28 April until 13 May.^{[4]:184} The final death toll climbed to 306 PLAN insurgents while on the South African side, had been finalized at 20 policemen, 5 SADF/SWATF members and over 100 wounded.^{[4]:184[3]:432} The South Africans were worried about a further PLAN incursion around 4 May but it failed to materialise.^{[4]:184}

34.8 Peace returns

On 19 May the South African's, Angolan's and Cuban's released a statement stating that all SADF/SWATF units were now confined to base and that the fighting was over and the implementation of UN Resolution 435 and the independence process would resume.^{[4]:184}

34.9 Aftermath

By the 26 June, the SADF had withdrawn all its troops except for 1500 soldiers who were confined to their bases at Grootfontein and Oshivelo and would remain there until a week after the announcement of the election result.^[2] Due to the vastness of the Namibian countryside, the election day voting was spread from 7 to 11 November.^[2] Ballot counting begun on the 13 November.^[2] By the 14 November, the United Nations Special Representative for Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari, declared the election as free and fair and announced the result.^[6] The result of the election left SWAPO as the winner of the election with 57.3% of the vote, Democratic Turnhalle Alliance 28.6 %, United Democratic Front 5.6% and the Action Christian National received 3.5%.^[6] By the 21 November 1989, the last remaining 1500 soldiers of the South African Defense Force, based at Grootfontein and Oshivelo, were withdrawn from Namibia.^[2] On the 21 March 1990, an independence ceremony was held in Namibian capital of Windhoek.^[7] In attendance was South African President FW de Klerk who watched the lowering of the South African flag and the raising of the new Namibian flag.^[7] The new Namibian President Sam Nujoma was then sworn in by UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar.^[7]

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