

## **Zimbabwe: Operation Drama**

- 176 The outcome of the independence election was not quite the worst-case scenario feared by South Africa. That would have been a ZAPU victory. Nonetheless, the failure of Muzorewa's UANC to secure a place in the ZANU/ZAPU coalition was a setback. Its initial public response was diplomatically correct; its covert response was counter-revolutionary. At its first post-election meeting on 10 March 1980, the SSC declared Messina an "SADF operational area". This was in order to give the SADF "*meer beweergruimte*" (more room to manoeuvre) to facilitate the clandestine transfer of RENAMO to South Africa which, according to the SANDF's second submission to the Commission, began in March 1980.
- 177 The deployment of RENAMO was part of a much larger exercise involving the transfer to South Africa of various parts of Rhodesia's pre-independence security apparatus. This included several hundred black members of Bishop Muzorewa's Security Force Auxiliaries who were deployed to a farm near Pretoria. Simultaneously, the SADF launched *Operation Winter* to recruit mainly white members of Rhodesia's various counter-insurgency units. The operation was directed by Major General FW Loots, then general officer commanding of Special Forces, who personally travelled to Rhodesia in the last days of the Smith regime to screen potential recruits.
- 178 In all, it is estimated that about 5 000 Rhodesian military personnel were recruited into the SADF in this period. Apart from skilled counter-insurgency specialists, other security personnel who joined this southern exodus at independence or soon afterwards included some Special Branch police officers and intelligence personnel from the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). Amongst these was Mr Gray Branfield, who was assigned to Daisy farm adjacent to Vlakplaas, to run a Zimbabwe Special Operations Unit. Branfield ran a string of agents inside Zimbabwe, the most important of whom were Mr Christopher 'Kit' Bawden, his cousin Mr Barry Bawden, and Mr Michael Smith.
- 179 Other security and intelligence personnel who moved south and were integrated into MI were Mr Pat Keyser, Mr Eric May, Mr Bob Wishart, Mr Peter Stanton and former Selous Scout Peter Grant. They were integrated either into Special Forces, DST, which ran the surrogate forces, or the DCC. Stanton later became a member of the CCB.

- 180 Their departure notwithstanding, a fifth column of South African agents remained intact inside Zimbabwe, strategically located within the military, the police and the CIO. Possibly the most sensitive of these was CIO operative Geoffrey Burton Price, retained by President Mugabe as his head of close security after independence. Others who have been named as agents working from inside in the immediate post-independence period are CIO members Colin Evans and Philip Hartlebury, and security police officials Alan Trowsdale, Alec West and the CIO head in Bulawayo, Matthew 'Matt' Calloway. Another CIO member who admits to having assisted some of these operatives was Mr Kevin Woods.
- 181 With the above infrastructure in place and large numbers of ex-Rhodesian soldiers in camps in the northern Transvaal, the SADF was well placed to launch *Operation Drama* – a militarily-driven project aimed at destabilising the new independent government of Zimbabwe. Its objective was, *inter alia*, to ensure that the government did not provide concrete support to the ANC and PAC in their armed struggles. To this end, it recruited and trained Zimbabweans, primarily for sabotage operations designed to destroy infrastructure, damage the economy and undermine the military capacity of Zimbabwe's armed forces.
- 182 In a statement to the Commission, Lieutenant Kenneth Gwenzi, who joined the Rhodesian army in 1978, tells how he was recruited into the SADF by members of MI soon after independence. He claims that he and a group of black former Rhodesian soldiers worked under four white former Rhodesian military officers from a camp in Venda. Their brief was to follow ANC cadres leaving South Africa as well as to conduct sabotage operations inside Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Railway lines were the primary targets.

*In 1981, four former Rhodesians were killed forty miles inside Matabeleland in a contact with the Zimbabwean army. They were Sergeants Robert Trevor Beech, Peter David Berry, and John Andrew Wessels and a black serviceman known to the Commission only as 'Private Khiwa'. (While the SADF acknowledged the death of the three whites, it has never admitted to the death of Khiwa.)*

*In the 1970s, prior to Zimbabwe's independence, both Beech and Wessels had been members of the Rhodesian Light Infantry while Berry had served in the Special Air Service (SAS). Berry joined the SADF at Messina in March 1980, two weeks prior to Zimbabwe's independence. Beech and Wessels joined in 1980 when they moved to South Africa after Zimbabwe's independence.*