



Rhodesian Army's Selous Scouts

The Rhodesian Army's Scouts evolved to varying extents from the Tracker Combat Unit of the Rhodesian Army, the CIO (Central Intelligence Organization), and the Special Branch of the BSAP (British South Africa Police). When Major Ron Reid Daly was given the mission of forming the Scouts, Rhodesia's borders were becoming less and less secure, as ZANLA and ZIPRA terrorists infiltrated in greater and greater numbers.

Although the cover mission for the Selous Scouts remained the tracking of terrorists, in reality the unit was both a long-range penetration unit and a pseudo-terrorist unit. Using turned terrorists and Black soldiers from the Rhodesian African Rifles, as well as White soldiers in black face make-up the Selous Scouts pseudo-gangs were a valuable direct action and intelligence unit. These pseudo groups would infiltrate terrorist areas of operation, passing themselves off as terrorists and attempting to subvert, destroy or spy on selected elements of the terrorist infrastructure.

The Selous Scouts learned from US counter-insurgency successes in Vietnam, drawing on the examples of the Phoenix Program, the Kit Carson Scouts and the Road Runner Teams. They resembled the successful pseudo teams, which had been active earlier in Kenya during the Mau Mau Uprising. Constantly adding turned terrorists, the Scouts kept abreast of current terrorist terminology, identification procedures, and operations; often they were better informed about terrorist procedures than the terrorists themselves.

As the Selous Scouts evolved, they undertook their long-range penetration mission: cross-border raids, assassinations, snatches, and raids on terrorist HQs in Botswana or

elsewhere. They also carried out long-range reconnaissance, and various other types of special operations.

One early raid typical of Selous Scouts' decapitation missions was the snatch of a key ZIPRA official from Francistown, Botswana, in March 1974. These direct action operations resembled in many ways the MAC V/SOG operations in Vietnam. The number of Vietnam veterans in the Rhodesian security forces, in fact, had a substantial influence on the conduct of the war and on slang that was used. Terrorists, for example, were often called 'gooks'.

The Scouts lured terrorists into ambushes, from which no terrorists normally walked away. They captured terrorists and then turned them to serve in one of the Scout pseudo groups; or turned them over to the BSAP for interrogation.

The Scouts were very successful in gathering intelligence, at least in part from captured diaries, letters and other documents. The communists were, as always, prolific records keepers. Paperwork was an important element of counterinsurgency operations. Red terrorists often over-relied on written communication, which causes them to keep tons of archives. Few guerrillas are sophisticated enough to use ciphers, either, so often captured communications were 'in the clear'. Many politically inspired guerrillas were actually encouraged to keep diaries documenting their political development, and these also frequently include valuable intelligence information. African terrorists are generally much less security conscious than organized military forces about documents; hence, captured written material can be an excellent intelligence source, especially for order of battle data.

The Selous Scouts' training and operational doctrine inculcated audacity and initiative seeking behavior; two qualities now frowned upon by the conventional micro-managed US Army. At various times, for example, White Selous Scouts posed as the 'prisoners' of Black Selous Scout 'terrorists', and were escorted into terrorist strongholds, where White prisoners were highly prized. At the appropriate moment, the Selous Scouts turned their weapons on the terrorists, wreaking havoc from within. The classic example of audacity was the Selous Scouts raid on the large ZANLA terrorist camp at Nyadzonya Pungwe in August 1976. Using Unimogs and Ferrets painted in FRELIMO camouflage, eighty-four Selous Scouts penetrated Mozambique and drove directly into a large terrorist camp. Thousands of terrorists were in camp preparing for morning formations, when the Scouts opened up with 20mm cannons, .50 MGs, 12.7mm MGs, 7.62mm MGs and rifles. Estimates of the number of terrorists killed run as high as 1,000, all for five slightly wounded Selous Scouts. As the Scouts retreated to Rhodesia they blew up the Pungwe Bridge behind them, frustrating pursuit.

The importance of audacious small unit offensives has been proved again and again in counterinsurgency operations Selous Scouts in Rhodesia. Because communist and Islamic terrorists tend to think of themselves as the aggressors who take the war to the capitalist fat cats, they are often themselves extremely complacent in their 'safe' areas. By showing the terrorists that they were never safe from the 'Skuz'apo' (as the terrorists called the Selous Scouts) the Scouts exerted a psychologically debilitating effect quite out of proportion to their numbers. It was not uncommon, for example, for two groups of terrorists to begin shooting at each other out of fear that the other group was the Selous Scouts.

Selous Scouts operations offered a number of lessons including:

- First, calculated audacity will often allow a small counter-insurgency force to inflict casualties quite out of proportion to the numbers of men involved.
- Secondly, terrorists, who rely heavily on fear as a weapon, can themselves be rendered psychologically impotent through fear when they become the prey of an enemy who appears, hits hard, and then vanishes; who, in effect, turns their own weapons against them.

Selous Scouts relied heavily on unconventional selection and training procedures. Unconventional, but they worked and turned out some of the finest counter-insurgency warriors of all time. Selous Scouts couldn't count on ready resupply, for example, so early on the fledgling Selous Scout had to learn to live on lean rations or off the enemy and the land. During initial selection the Selous Scout was given one ration pack, but not told what to do with it. As the next days passed, that transpired to be the only food that would be provided. Some Scouts foraged around the training area to supplement that initial ration. Before long, an instructor shot a monkey and hung it in the middle of camp, where during the next few days of training it became riper and riper, its smell soon pervading the camp. Finally, after days of rigorous training the now ravenous trainee Selous Scouts were treated to the sight of the maggot-infested carcass being cooked to provide their first meal in days. Most managed to get it down, in the process learning that if one is hungry enough, protein can be provided from tainted meat, or even maggots. They also learned that even tainted meat is edible if thoroughly boiled, though it should not be reheated a second time. **The obvious lesson here is that those being trained to survive under harsh conditions must be trained harshly.**

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