

1 ZIMBABWE'S LIBERATION STRUGGLE AND RHODESIA'S BUSH WAR

Locating Its History

Naming the past is a way to talk about the present; it signals a position. In this case it proves either one's support or disdain for self-determination and African nationalism. How does one name the past I write about? Between 1898 and 1980 the country that is now Zimbabwe had four names: Southern Rhodesia (1898–1964, but as Southern Rhodesia part of the Central African Federation from 1953 to 1963), Rhodesia (1964–79), Zimbabwe-Rhodesia (1979), and Zimbabwe (1980–). This has made for unwieldy chronologies and awkward historiography, to the point that it has been commonplace to reduce the four names to two, Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. These in turn became a shorthand for race that created a series of either/or scenarios that omitted too much. The two names and all they embody have allowed for some self-serving discursive flourishes in which authors vow never to return to Rhodesia only to arrive in Zimbabwe at the start of the next chapter.¹ But this has reduced a complicated history to a progression from one separate and distinct country to another, from minority-ruled Rhodesia to majority-ruled Zimbabwe.

In most of these histories, Rhodesia was a placeholder, an aberration in the postcolonial world that delayed African rule in a country that had another name. There is a large body of scholarly literature that uses the term “colonial Zimbabwe” for the period before 1980 even though neither Southern Rhodesia nor Rhodesia was a colony; other literature calls Rhodesia Southern Rhodesia as if its period of renegade independence should not be named. I argue that the Rhodesia-to-Zimbabwe story is too limited to fully describe its fractured and sometimes bewildering history. The war about which I write was an enormous part of that history, and what an author calls that war literally stakes out a political position. Zimbabwe's



Map 1.1 Rhodesia, 1964–1979.

liberation struggle is enshrined in nationalist historiography. However nuanced and critical an analysis is, this was the story of guerrilla armies defeating minority rule in Southern Africa years after the era of decolonization. What Rhodesians—even after there was no country of Rhodesia—called the bush war has another meaning. At its best it is the story of brave white men defending their land, and at worst it removes the struggle from a political context: it describes where white men patrolled and fought; it reveals nothing about what they fought for.

How, then, do I write the history of a war, or any part of that war, when the most basic vocabulary with which to describe the conflict—the names of the country—carries so much content that it can overwhelm analysis? Are white soldiers fighting for an independent white-ruled Rhodesia Africans or just whites? There's the additional problem that this book is about a war in a country that no longer exists. Did this mean that Rhodesia could be whatever authors wanted it to be? Was it the place where white men did what needed to be done, where they said, "So far and no further"?² Rhodesia became a locus for like-minded men, fictional Americans who

“felt like” Rhodesians or fictional white Kenyans for whom fighting African guerrillas elsewhere was “personal” (see chapter 8). Or was it the more prosaic place where this imaginary never fully took hold nor did it fully overlap with white supremacy (see chapters 3 and 4)? How did former soldiers, whatever their nationality or wherever they thought they belonged, write about this war after 1980? That question troubled me for many years, but I seem to have worried too much. Rhodesian soldiers were not alone in writing about countries that no longer existed: the Confederacy or the Boer Republics of South Africa all had national narratives that came after the nation was lost in a war. These former soldiers replaced a war of weapons with a war of words, as Bill Nasson put it. Nasson describes postwar Boer writing—“Afrikaaner” was not in common use before 1920—in terms of its materiality. The South African war left a “residue.” It cast “a long shadow” because the meaning of its history was concrete in the sense that it was the opposite of transparent: it began Boer history anew; it prevented a critical look at what went before the war. Afrikaaner nationalism was thus built on the victories and defeats and agonies and attacks of the war.³ Much of this can be said about the Confederacy and to a lesser extent about Biafra—a favorite Rhodesian example of British perfidy—where the short-lived nation became more popular as a lost cause than it had been as a cause.⁴ In contrast, Rhodesian writing about the bush war did not create a unified wartime experience (see chapter 2). Soldiers’ war of words was not so much about Rhodesian nationalism—which I have argued was never a straightforward project—as it was about the confusion and contradictions of the war itself. There was nothing concrete in its imagery; it was a literature that struggled over what being a white Rhodesian meant, and what pasts and futures soldiers brought to the war.

Some History

There are basic histories needed to understand this war. In 1896–97, when the country was under the rule of Cecil Rhodes’s British South Africa Company, adventurer administrators organized a disastrous invasion of the Transvaal. Almost at once there was an uprising in the country. Many European settlers were killed, and the repression was brutal. Moreover, the repression brought bushcraft to the fore: hunters and trackers used their knowledge of the wild to hunt and track Africans. Whether the rising was

a war of clans and spirit mediums who attacked white settlers or an anti-colonial revolt organized by clans and spirit mediums does not matter for this book, at least not as much as the extent to which the fear of another uprising became a staple of white popular culture in the country.⁵ Almost sixty years later there was the creation and demise of the Central African Federation (1953–63). An amalgamation of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland had been proposed for years.⁶ It only came about after the decolonizations of the late 1940s—in India especially but also Cyprus and Israel—when the Colonial Office sought new territorial forms, not simply to rule but to end its rule. African opposition was intense from the start, but the colonial overreaction during the Nyasaland Emergency of 1959 led to commissions that recommended it be dissolved. The issue was not just British and Southern Rhodesian soldiers firing on unarmed protesters; the issue was that this took place in 1959, when most of Anglophone Africa was preparing for independence.⁷

Southern Rhodesia did not prepare for independence, or at least not independence with majority rule. In 1961, as the federation was understood to be failing, Southern Rhodesia produced a new constitution. It was considered a masterful document that Africans had a hand, albeit a small one, in crafting. It promised Africans equal representation in parliament in an unrealistic fifteen years. The constitution was at first accepted by African nationalists, including Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe, then of the National Democratic Party (NDP), and then rejected by them, creating two linked narratives that would last twenty years, that whites offered too little, too late and that Africans were intransigent, rejecting all incremental improvements.⁸ The NDP was not the only political party opposing the new constitution, however. In 1962 the Rhodesian Front (RF), led by Ian Smith and supported by far-right segregationist parties, won a narrow victory proposing independence instead of decolonization. Although Britain opposed this, most of the war matériel belonging to the federation and the entirety of its air force were returned to Southern Rhodesia in 1963. The official rationale is that these forces began there and should be returned, but throughout the continent it was understood that the country was given the military capacity to withstand an invasion. In 1964, when Northern Rhodesia became independent as Zambia and Southern Rhodesia changed its name to Rhodesia, the RF was elected by a landslide and began acrimonious negotiations with Britain over its future. In November 1965, a week after the British governor had extended the state of emergency, Rhodesia made a Unilateral Declaration of Indepen-

dence. This was UDI, an acronym used to describe the act and the period of Rhodesia's independence.⁹

The NDP had been banned before the 1961 constitution was in place. It then became the People's Caretaker Council (PCC) before it was banned again when it became the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in exile. It was led by Nkomo, whom many members considered increasingly autocratic. In 1963, when he proposed to make ZAPU a government in exile so that he could negotiate with Britain as head of government, many party members left ZAPU to form the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). Years later this was explained by several binaries, that the split was between Shona and Ndebele peoples or between Soviet and Chinese clients. Both explanations are woefully inadequate. While the leaders of ZANU—especially Rev. Ndabaningini Sithole, Robert Mugabe, and Herbert Chitepo—were indeed Shona speakers, they had all once been connected to liberal, multiracial political parties.¹⁰ ZAPU had regular contacts with the USSR since the early 1960s; by the 1970s it had secure lines of East European funding; Rhodesians insisted that there was rarely, if ever, a shortage of weapons (see chapter 6). In its early years, ZANU was not regarded as a serious rival to ZAPU by its East European donors. Chinese support for ZANU only became noteworthy after the Sino-Soviet split; between 1963 and 1966, ZANU was closer to Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana and its particular vision of Pan-Africanism than it was to any Cold War ideology. The party had no real benefactor in its early years, with the bulk of its weapons coming from guns purchased from the black markets of Congo by its representative in Zambia. At least as important as ethnicity or Cold War politics, however, were contemporary, continent-wide events: ZANU grew up, as it were, with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), also founded in 1963.¹¹ Both ZANU and the PCC were banned in Rhodesia in 1964, and Nkomo, Mugabe, and Sithole spent the next ten years in detention. These detentions meant that African politics took place increasingly in Rhodesia's prisons.

In December 1965 the foreign ministers of the OAU countries declared war on Rhodesia; they set up a Liberation Committee, based in Dar es Salaam because several liberation movements had camps in Tanzania, which would channel East European funds to guerrilla armies. The OAU regarded ZAPU as the legitimate guerrilla army struggling to liberate Zimbabwe. In 1966 ZANU's national chairman, Herbert Chitepo, left Tanzania, where he had been director of public prosecutions, for Lusaka, where he became the head of ZANU's external wing. He was to organize ZANU's armed struggle

from there, which meant he sought East European funding for weapons and uniforms. Neither ZANU nor ZAPU had anything resembling an army, however. Both had youth wings that had honed their skills in township violence—a tendency in ZAPU thought this would encourage Rhodesia to negotiate majority rule—and many of these men went to Tanzania or Zambia to train as guerrillas. Starting in 1963, perhaps one hundred young ZAPU were sent to the USSR, China, North Korea, and Cuba for training. When they returned to Zambia, they were tasked with training ZAPU's military wing. ZAPU's joint operations with South Africa's African National Congress—a well-established favorite of Soviet support—in 1967 and 1968 gave it revolutionary credentials above and beyond the failed infiltration. ZANU's first incursions into Rhodesia were even less successful. Most of the cadres who were deployed were untrained and unarmed; many had been in exile so long that they were confused by new landmarks of tarmacked roads and plowed fields. ZANU's army became the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) in 1965; in 1966, when ZANU had men in training camps, the OAU recognized it as a legitimate liberation movement.¹²

As more and more men were trained by ZANU and ZAPU in the camps of Tanzania, there were more and more debates about how the armed struggle should be fought. Life in the camps was often tense. Even press-ganged men seemed to want to fight, and to fight with guns (see chapter 6). There were mutinies. The March 11 Movement in ZAPU in 1971 and the Nhari Rebellion in ZANLA in 1975 were not solely about ideology or ethnicity, as many authors have argued, but about strategy, training, and most of all favoritism and corruption in senior staff. Many March 11 rebels were deported to Rhodesia, where several were tried for treason and hanged, but those who remained in Zambia encouraged a debate within the army about discipline and favoritism. ZAPU then re-created its army as the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (the acronym of which was written as it was pronounced, ZIPRA) but not before a large number of guerrillas—ZANLA claimed one-third of ZAPU's fighting force—crossed over to ZANLA in Zambia and in Kongwa camp in Tanzania. Another protest against the conduct of both armies was the creation of a new party in 1971, the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI). Its only army was made up of defectors; its main source of support was from Zimbabwean exiles abroad. After six months of claiming to be an army rather than a political party, it was given funds by the Liberation Committee. The physical and rhetorical struggles between ZANU and ZAPU in early 1970s Tanzania and Zambia had

been barely manageable: a new political unit, whether it was a party or an army, was intolerable. ZANU and ZAPU formed a joint military command that paid lip service to a unified liberation movement, but its goal was to strengthen both parties' claim to OAU funds.

The Nhari mutiny and its repression changed the history of ZANLA, in part because they coincided with an attempt to negotiate an end to the war. This was the *détente* promoted by Henry Kissinger of the United States, several multinational corporations, and South Africa, and intensified by the Carnation Revolution in Portugal in 1974 and the pending independence of Angola and Mozambique. The presidents of the frontline states—Tanzania, Botswana, and Mozambique—met with Nkomo and Sithole, who were released from detention to attend the meeting in Lusaka in November 1974. After three weeks of tense meetings, a declaration of unity was signed by the leaders of ZANU, ZAPU, and FROLIZI to join forces under the label of Bishop Abel Muzorewa's enlarged African National Council (ANC), which had mobilized ZAPU in Rhodesia to oppose a settlement plan in 1972 but was fully compromised by Rhodesia's Special Branch in 1973. Two long-serving ZANU foot soldiers, Thomas Nhari and Dakari Badza, led a group from a camp in Mozambique to Lusaka, where they killed and kidnapped several ZANU. By the time the mutineers returned to Mozambique, ZANLA had sent cadres chosen from men from camps in Tanzania, where I was told they had more experience with guns, to hunt them down. Perhaps 150 of Nhari mutineers were executed there. Three months later, Chitepo, who signed the execution orders, was killed by a car bomb in Lusaka. Within a week, fifty-seven ZANU members and ZANLA officials were arrested and 1,300 ZANLA were detained in their camps in Zambia. Who killed Chitepo—still the subject of great debate—is less germane for this history than is the imprisonment of so many senior ZANLA at the same time guerrillas were supposed to fight under the umbrella of the ANC, which created almost eighteen months of disarray in the armed struggle.¹³ Cadres complained that they did not know who they were fighting for, although ZIPRA was able to establish itself in camps in Zambia during this time. (By the late 1970s, ZAPU had a larger army in Zambia than Zambia did.) Rhodesian forces held their ground during these months of confusion in guerrilla armies but did not manage anything resembling a decisive victory. In May 1976 senior officers from ZANLA and ZIPRA founded the Zimbabwe People's Army (made into the word ZIPA). Based in Mozambique and aggressively presenting itself as a revolutionary force capable of invading Rhodesia, they denounced negotiations as unnecessary.

They did not receive OAU funds, although they controlled ZANLA's camps in Mozambique, but received monies from Olusegun Obasanjo in Nigeria and blessings from Samora Machel in Mozambique, who introduced them to the Scandinavian embassies that might support them. In recent years ZIPA has been infused with nostalgia, the democratic alternative that never reached fruition, but whatever its promise, ZIPA's most important accomplishment was to put ZANLA and ZIPRA on notice: if they weren't going to actively fight a war, someone else would.¹⁴

By 1976 both armies had more recruits than they could usefully train, and by 1977, when both ZANLA and ZIPRA regrouped it was to fight a Rhodesia that had lurched from one botched attempt at settlement to another. Pressured by skilled and heavy-handed British and American diplomats, keenly aware of South Africa's near exasperation with the Rhodesian project, Smith and the Rhodesian Front agreed to the internal settlement of 1978.¹⁵ The settlement was between the RF and several domesticated African political parties: Muzorewa's newly renamed United African National Congress (UANC); Ndabaningini Sithole's ZANU, which he hoped would have some legitimacy after he was ousted as party leader by Mugabe, who now headed ZANU(PF); and Chief Jeremiah Chirau's Zimbabwe United People's Organization (ZUPO), which had almost no credibility outside of white political circles. ZANU and ZAPU had formed the Patriotic Front (PF) in order to appear unified at the conference in Geneva in 1976. There was no real unity, but ZANU created a new acronym, ZANU(PF). The 1978 settlement allowed for very close to one man, one vote elections the following year. Both Sithole and Muzorewa claimed to have surrendered guerrillas on their side (see chapter 9), and as Rhodesia planned an election—one the Patriotic Front boycotted—during a war, the Rhodesian security forces sought a way to retrain and deploy these former guerrillas. Many were not guerrillas and were press-ganged at least as much as early ZANLA and ZIPRA had been; many of the men who trained them thought many were unemployed urban youth or petty thieves seeking a way to hone their skills. Starting in 1978, ZIPRA brought thousands of soldiers from Angola and Zambia who had been trained in conventional warfare; their deployment changed the war dramatically, as ZANLA began to infiltrate more and more guerrillas over a wider area.

Muzorewa won the election of March 1979. Depending on who one believes, he won 43 percent of the vote or 69 percent in an election declared free and fair by the official British observers. Rhodesia became Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, which was called "Rhobabwe" almost at once. It had an African

head of state and Africans in its cabinet. Muzorewa was considered “weak” by the Rhodesian military. The former generals I have spoken to said he did whatever whites told him to do, which was to exert a level of force, especially airpower, that previously had not been deployed.¹⁶ The years 1978 and 1979 were a period of cross-border bombing raids, sometimes in retaliation for an attack, as in the bombing of Westlands and Mkushi camps in Zambia in 1978, and sometimes as bold strategy as in attacks on various camps in Mozambique. Guerrilla forces tended to see airborne attacks as Rhodesia’s desperation and, indeed, planes were shot down, men were killed, and key targets escaped capture as the number of increasingly well-armed ZIPRA and ZANLA increased. At the same time, the number and arms of soldiers loyal to Muzorewa grew. They were funded primarily by South Africa and soon became a private army—Pfumu reVanhu, spear of the people—as did Sithole’s more problematic cadres (see chapter 9).

The bombing raids into Zambia and Mozambique changed the course of the war and shaped how it would end. Although Kenneth Kaunda and Samora Machel, along with every other African leader, denounced Muzorewa and his election as illegitimate, they knew that even 40-odd percent of the vote was proof of some popularity, and if his regime could survive it might eventually be recognized as legitimate. In August 1979 the Commonwealth Heads of State met in Lusaka, where, after private conversations with almost every African head of state, a version of the Anglo-American proposals of 1977 was made into a formal recommendation for the end of the war. Britain then invited the PF, Muzorewa’s government, and the RF to a meeting in London at Lancaster House. Both Nkomo and Mugabe denounced the proposals and the meetings, at least in public. In private they were lectured by Machel—and possibly cautioned by Kaunda—who told them that if there was a way to end the war through negotiations the PF should take it. The negotiations at Lancaster House took three contentious months, but in the end a cease-fire was put in place and elections scheduled for late February 1980.¹⁷ As we shall see, Rhodesians loved to say they won every battle and lost at the negotiating table (see chapter 2). That’s wrong: white-ruled Rhodesia did very well in the constitution written in London; it was Zimbabwe-Rhodesia that was all but erased. Zimbabwe-Rhodesia was to become Southern Rhodesia until the election; it was for the first time under direct British control. Muzorewa and his supporters and donors were left struggling for his political life, and his army became more aggressive and violent than ever before.

Manpower and War Power

This history is essential, but it omits one salient point that informed this war and informs this book, that neither Southern Rhodesia nor Rhodesia ever had a sizable or a stable white population. From the conventional founding moment of the seven-hundred-strong Pioneer Column arriving in 1890 to 1980, the white population was transient in the extreme. Rhodesia was a land of opportunity; when it was not, men and women moved on. Southern Rhodesia became one of many sites in the circular migration of skilled and semiskilled white men in the industries of central Africa. White population growth was through immigration, not births, but two-thirds of the white immigrants who came between 1921 and 1964 left the country. The emigration was intensified by war. By the 1970s, the Rhodesian press disparaged the men and women who came and went, calling them “good time Charlies” and “rainbow boys.”¹⁸ Even so, the idea of those early pioneers—men and women who coaxed wealth from inhospitable land and who put down an uprising—lasted for decades. In 1966, a cartoon history of the first year of UDI featured one frame in which a white farmer is interviewed for radio. “My opinion on orderly hand-over? Tell them that after a lifetime of hacking a farm from the tough African bush I hand over nothing—orderly or disorderly.”¹⁹ Belonging was not a matter of personal history; it was an imaginative project, one that gave whites a claim to African soil.²⁰

The question of who should fight this war, and what skin color they should fight in, informs this book (see chapters 3, 8, and 9). There were certainly not enough whites to fight a prolonged war. Southern Rhodesia’s white soldiers were known, if they were known at all, for fighting somewhere else. Ian Smith had been a fighter pilot during World War II. He had trained in Southern Rhodesia, was shot down in Italy, and had fought with Italian partisans there. Several whites fought as volunteers in Malaya in 1951; the Malaya Scouts were loosely affiliated with c Squadron Special Air Services (SAS); these men served in the Rhodesia Regiment (RR), which had fought with the British Army in the Boer War, World War I, and World War II. It was part of the federal army that served in Nyasaland in 1959. In 1961—beginning an era that saw the greatest increase in white immigration—Southern Rhodesia raised an all-white infantry unit, the Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI), which was to become the largest regiment of the war. As the federation’s weapons of war were transferred to Southern Rhodesia, officers commanding African troops asked for two battalions

of the African infantry unit, the Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR). The RAR was originally the Rhodesia Native Regiment, formed in 1916; it became the RAR in 1940. It was one of the African regiments that liberated Southeast Asia in World War II. It was an askari regiment, African soldiers commanded by white officers—a commonplace colonial regiment often called “rifles”—that was by far the most experienced infantry unit in the country, and by many reckonings the most effective in the late 1970s. In 1963 the RF refused another African battalion: I have been told the party feared African soldiers, but that the army did not. By the end of the war, the army had won: there were three RAR battalions, a depot, and a jazz band.²¹

In the last years of the Central African Federation, conscription was considered necessary to address the new contingencies of African nationalism. In 1960, Southern Rhodesia introduced a superficial conscription of four months for young men—white, Coloured, and Indian—who had resided in the country for two years or more. Coloured was a legal category referring to people of mixed race. The Rhodesian Army had an acronym for nonwhite troops, CAE, for Coloured, Asian (meaning Indian), and Eurasian. Coloureds and Indians served in two units, eventually combined into the Rhodesian Defence Regiment, which primarily provided transport and supply. In 1960, the first conscripts were sent to the border Northern Rhodesia shared with the newly independent Congo, where young white Southern Rhodesians were said to have watched in horror as Belgians fled for their lives.²² At the time of UDI—when the OAU declared war on Rhodesia—national service for whites, Indians, and Coloureds was increased to four and a half months. In 1970, South Africa rotated between one thousand and fifteen hundred policemen in and out of Rhodesia; there is a body of literature that regards this as the essence of white supremacy, as the ultimate linkage between the apartheid and Rhodesian governments. Some of the most prominent murderers of the South African state served in Rhodesia and credited their time there with how they learned to fight terrorism.²³ Rhodesian Army documents and my own conversations have suggested something very different, however: they were poorly trained and had almost no success in operational areas. I have been told that these were urban policemen incapable of life in the bush; they were bad shots and not disciplined. They could not hold their own with those white Rhodesians who knew the land.²⁴

Once the guerrilla war began, and certainly by 1972, conscription of white Rhodesian youths intensified, but by then Rhodesia was a republic and could only call up citizens, rather than residents. This was finessed

somewhat with practices that would not have withstood the scrutiny of international law, but by 1972 whites were leaving Rhodesia in record numbers, while other immigrant families were reluctant to apply for citizenship. Foreign soldiers arrived—for many, Rhodesia was the last stand of empire at least in an English-speaking country—but the importance of these men resonated outside the country, not within its armed forces (see chapter 8).

The basic outlines of national service are that by 1972, all white males aged eighteen to twenty-five were required to undertake nine months of “service training” in the army or the police. After their initial service, these men could then be called up over the next three years to serve in the Territorial Army, a force made up of civilians who had completed their military training commanded by regular officers. In mid-1975, national service was extended to one year, and all white males aged twenty-five to thirty were liable to call-ups for fifty-nine days each year; this was extended to eighty-four days almost at once. Men aged thirty to thirty-eight were liable to call-ups for shorter periods. In 1976 conscription was first increased to a year, and then to eighteen months by the year’s end; the age limit was raised from thirty to thirty-four.²⁵ Men aged eighteen to thirty-four who had fulfilled their national service obligation were now placed on “continuous call-up” for the Territorial Army: they could be redeployed for unspecified intervals. This was so disastrous for morale and administration that the army sought ways to get men to stay longer, such as bonuses for enlisting for an extra year. By 1977, however, the call-up was a nightmare to run. Officers routinely complained that they spent more time administering call-ups than they did fighting. Equipment was always in short supply. In 1977, for example, the British South African Police (BSAP) only had radios for half the men it called up each year.²⁶ Starting in 1978, territorials and police reservists under thirty-eight were required to serve a maximum of 190 days per year, although half the younger group did not report for duty. Men aged thirty-eight to forty-nine were called up for ten weeks in periods of two to four weeks at a time, but only the most experienced soldiers in that age-group were placed on active duty. By then the RF was desperate enough to entertain ideas about how to abolish the call-up altogether, but by January 1979 this was impossible. In preparation for the April election, the manpower requirements were such that men fifty to sixty years old were called up to serve as guards in urban areas. The army had hoped to find those former regular soldiers who had avoided call-ups since their retirements, but only 20 percent of the men called up came forward.²⁷

Given Rhodesia's white population, even if every man called up served, there were still not a lot of soldiers with whom to fight a war. What this meant in practice was that the army in particular favored small groups that were tracking units that combined idealized rural boyhoods in which white youths learned the ways of the wild—the “bush” in “bush war”—with twentieth-century counterinsurgency tactics (see chapters 3 and 4). These groups were tasked with gathering intelligence and identifying guerrilla bands so that larger units could capture and perhaps kill them, although kills were detrimental to the process of finding out who and where guerrillas were. “Turning” was an obsession for these small groups, the practice by which guerrillas could be made to change sides and return to their groups to gather intelligence (see chapters 3 and 4). There were to be carefully crafted stories to explain turned guerrillas or white men masquerading as guerrillas to guerrilla gangs. These practices suggest that counterinsurgency may be a misnomer; it was not always clear, as Nicky Rousseau has argued, that the insurgents' insurgency came first.²⁸ By the last years of the war, the creation of Security Force Auxiliaries (SFAs) was the opposite of the ideal of small groups of soldiers and the intelligence they gathered through clever strategies and deceptions; it was also a way to deal directly with the manpower shortages that plagued the security forces. Indeed, the creation of SFAs gave the lie to many Rhodesian military tactics. However they were trained and whatever they did in the countryside, their numbers undermined the notion of small groups and subterfuge: the widespread assertions that many camps and patrols of SFAs were killed by security forces suggest that the difficulty of telling who was friend and who was foe had become as insurmountable as it was perhaps irrelevant, even as foes had changed their tactics (see chapter 9).

African studies have tended to study wars and soldiers in Africa as something separate and distinct from wars and soldiers elsewhere. This war in particular tends to stand alone; when it has been studied, it has been shown to have had guerrillas guided by spirit mediums. If white soldiers are discussed at all, they are usually folded into South Africa's border wars.²⁹ There is a literature known as Rhodesiana, which includes the memoirs I frequently cite, that insists on a Rhodesian exceptionalism—the land was theirs, whenever they arrived in the country, and they had every right to fight for it. Rhodesian-born authors were scathing about this, but they understood that if recent immigrants from Britain wanted “a pool and servants . . . to cut the grass you never had in the UK,” they would be willing to pay the price of “burning down the odd village.”³⁰ This was Rhodesian exceptionalism, a history of something imagined as “responsible government” that entitled a

defense of minority rule. This book argues against this. There was nothing exceptional in the Rhodesian project, but there was a specificity that shaped much of the conduct of this war: the landscape was critical to this, but so were the youths, whenever they arrived in the country, and their understanding of history. This was a war in a very particular place.

War-in-the-Place

Do men go to war for a place, a landscape? Is a new home or a fatherland the reason men are willing to risk life and limb? In his study of Anglo-American war memoirs, Samuel Hynes argues that men go to war because they have a “war-in-the-head,” that an older generation’s experience of war shapes what a younger generation hopes to find in battle.³¹ Thus, the British volunteers of World War I believed in the romance of the late nineteenth-century wars of conquest. In Rhodesia, no single war seemed to take hold in the minds of young soldiers, and no single conflict seemed to provide a singular imaginary. World War II was always present; members of the Rhodesian Front—the name itself recalled the National Front in Britain—routinely called decolonization “appeasement” and spoke of Munich often. Smith’s war service was invariably mentioned by foreign journalists but was of no real interest to national servicemen. As a war-in-the-head World War II was distinctly personal. The travel writer Jan Morris met a law professor in 1977, “soft spoken, learned and anything but racist,” who spent one week each month flying troops to remote operational areas. It was invigorating, he said, a reprise of his time in the Royal Air Force (RAF) during World War II.³² By the early 1970s, however, generals had tethered the conduct of the 1970s war to that of 1897. The two new units formed to meet the demands of guerrilla warfare were given the names of the heroes of the repression of the rising. Courtney Selous, hunter of animals who became a hunter of men, was resuscitated in the Selous Scouts, a fabled pseudo-gang unit (see chapters 3, 4, and 5). Rhodesia’s mounted regiment, formed in 1975, was called Grey’s Scouts after George Grey, captain of the Bulawayo Field Force of 1896 (see chapter 8). The original police force that could not contain the rebellion, the British South Africa Company Police, became the British South African Police, which kept the name until 1980. Two end-of-empire conflicts—Malaya and Mau Mau in Kenya—may have helped shape Rhodesian strategies, in which white men masqueraded as black men or brown men to win a war, but they were never wars-in-the-head.

Young soldiers did not seem have their parents' or officers' wars in their heads. The American volunteers who gave interviews made ominous references to Angola or Vietnam (see chapter 8), but these were more about the political outcomes than anything to do with the way these wars were fought. The war-in-the-head for many young (and not so young) soldiers came from popular culture, not anyone's experience. Dennis Croukamp was a Rhodesian regular soldier who joined the army in 1964. Describing his second confirmed kill in the eastern highlands in 1970, he recalled, "It felt really good taking a life in this way. The Hollywood syndrome of holding one's heart and saying, 'Help me, I have killed someone' is a load of crap, it feels good, really good."³³ Dick Gledhill, an RLI commando born in Kenya and resident in Australia, was told to release the safety on his gun as soon as his parachute hit the ground: "It could mean the difference between who shoots first. Remember, it's not your job to die for your country. Your job is to make the other fucker die for his."³⁴ Did Gledhill paraphrase General Patton's speech to the Third Army that serves as the beginning of the 1970 movie and pass it off as his commanding officer's words, or did the officer paraphrase the speech? This book puts the war-in-the-head in its place. I argue that the location of this war—the bush war—became how and where it was imagined by Rhodesian soldiers. The landscape shaped their fighting, the hunting and tracking and sheer danger of rocks and rivers.

Peace-in-the-Head

Whatever wars were in their heads, what did Rhodesians see as an end of this war?³⁵ No one—not even the far-right segregationists—assumed that a total military victory was possible or even what that might mean. Was it routing every insurgent, in and out of the country? Was it unconditional surrender, in which guerrilla commanders handed over their automatic weapons in solemn defeat? Such futures were rarely voiced, if they were imagined at all. Writing about a very different African war, Isabel Hull has argued that the Germans' near extinction of noncombatants in their repression of the Herero revolt was the only kind of complete victory that was possible under military protocols. If there were to be no negotiations—or any kind of civilian end to the conflict—then the military conquest by a superior force required wider and wider bands of destruction.³⁶ Rhodesia, almost seventy-five years later, is the opposite case. The war was never fought for total victory, whatever that might have meant, and there was

never an imagined surrender of all guerrilla forces. The security forces did not have the ear of government until the election of 1979 and did not exert control over the government until after the Lancaster House agreement had been signed in December 1979.³⁷ Even then, Rhodesian security forces had little power. Operation Quartz had been promised in the event of a Mugabe victory; Rhodesian forces would take over the country and attack ZANLA in their assembly points. It never happened. “All day long,” a BSAP wrote, “we cleaned our weapons and waited for the code word ‘quartz’ to be transmitted on the radio,” but in vain. Instead, General Peter Walls, commander of the army, wrote a whiny letter to Margaret Thatcher asking her to void the election results and threatening a coup if she did not. She made him wait three days for a reply, delivered orally by the governor’s deputy.³⁸

Instead, the peace Rhodesian officials imagined was one that included enough Africans so as to prevent future war. In this way Walls was perhaps happier with Zimbabwe-Rhodesia than anyone else was. It was a government of African figureheads, willing to do what the military asked. Zimbabwe-Rhodesia might have been the best thing for the military, but starting in the early 1970s, before the guerrilla war intensified, officials and most officers understood that the peace had to be a negotiated settlement that would include Africans. Almost everyone agreed. Many of the memoirs I cite contain formulaic scenes in which the young men who want to leave the country when they are called up are lectured by their fathers: the job of a Rhodesian soldier, they were told, was to hold the line so that the government could have a strong position from which to negotiate.³⁹

Did young soldiers want more? Did they want a war in which Rhodesia would be victorious? In May 1976 military intelligence officers came to the university to examine slogans painted on the wall. “Let RLI loose, we’ll clean the country” and “We want control, let us loose, RLI.”⁴⁰ A year later—two years after mass conscription was in place and six months after majority rule was on the table—the army’s counterintelligence unit commissioned a survey of soldiers’ morale. Almost all soldiers complained about a lack of aggression: “Why do we only react?” All national servicemen—and the report capitalized “all”—worried about their ability to get good jobs when their national service was over, especially since they were liable to call-ups with territorial units. Many civilian firms now employed white women or Africans because they were not called up. There was “considerable bitterness” over university students being released early to begin their studies. The majority of men surveyed asked, “What are we fighting for if there is going to be majority rule?” Almost everyone insisted that call-ups be ex-

tended to Africans. Many said they would not accept a black government, and many more said they would not serve in the military of an African-ruled government. Everyone complained that they did not have “sufficient information” about government plans for the future.⁴¹

Soldiers’ specific comments showed contempt for strategies. Complaints about the lack of aggression became complaints about policies: “We should dominate the borders, but our orders allow Zambians to do so instead”; “The longer we hang back the more difficult it will be to knock out the terr bases”; “We can win this war so there is no point to any negotiations at this stage.” Some soldiers demanded that patrols be allowed to “eliminate” villages that willingly sheltered guerrillas.⁴² Most units complained that they were understrength in the field; military personnel were wasted in the rear (“too much cocktail party life” at the senior ranks). Almost everyone complained that the call-up needed to be rationalized. Too many units were understaffed and without trained specialists. To get units to full strength, many of those interviewed said they would be willing to serve with Coloured troops even though the “discipline of Coloured persons left much to be desired,” but almost all would be happy to serve with the RAR. An army at full strength, without favoritism, would allow the police to return to police work and reservists to “get into the army to be real soldiers.” At the moment, however, “this war is being fought as a no-win war.”⁴³

None of this is to suggest that soldiers wanted a complete military victory and officers and government officials wanted a negotiated settlement, but there was no fixed, shared vision of what peace would look like. Even if the Rhodesian Army had wanted to act on the bravado of the young men who demanded of army researchers that they be allowed to eliminate villages that sheltered guerrillas or to attack guerrilla bases across the border, they could not. Rhodesian security forces were not fully in control and sometimes not fully aware of government policies and strategies. What I want to argue from these examples—and what is critical to this book—is that almost no one believed that Rhodesia was trying to win the war.

Why Did They Fight?

Given all this, why did young white men fight in this war? For all the years I’ve been working on this project and for all the years I’ve written with and about oral history, I’ve never asked a former Rhodesian soldier why he fought. It is hard for me to imagine that any answer would not be

overdetermined. If men had said they fought against communism or for responsible government, they would not have explained their own motivation. Besides, had I asked that question, I would have done so in the early twenty-first century, years of Zimbabwe's precipitous decline and renewed antiwhite rhetoric and farm invasions. What would have been the right answer then? Sue Onslow and Annie Berry conducted ninety-three interviews with former Rhodesian soldiers in 2009–10. Although their questions and concerns are very different from my own, one example should make my point. When they asked, "Was it worth it?" a common reply was, "We were fighting to stop what has happened *now*." But the now of 2010 was different from that of 1983, or even 1990, when white farmers often remarked that they had never had it so good.⁴⁴ What would they have said then? Men might have believed that guerrillas were a communist threat—hard as it would be to credit from twenty-first-century policies—or because they believed Africans could not govern the country, but what young men believed and why they served and answered repeated call-ups are, I think, different issues. Instead of asking why men fought, I want to look at white soldiers' morale, and ask why they continued to fight, even as victory was not the goal.

Why did white Rhodesian men fight? Most of the Rhodesian security forces were men who served because they were legally required to do so. Memoirs and novels describe young men who served without enthusiasm because they were called up. Some were proud to do their duty, to be with their friends who were going to war, or thought it "cowardly not to defend one's country."⁴⁵ National service, however, was adjusted for those men accepted to universities abroad: men going to university in Britain were released early to do so, and intake periods were changed to coincide with the South African academic calendar. Young men served—at least until their degree programs started—with varying degrees of desire and commitment. Desertion remained punishable by death, but there was no formal mechanism to track down deserters or even the men who did not respond to their call-up papers.⁴⁶ Men did desert, or simply evaded national service for many years, but most army officers did not consider this a problem. In 1977, for example, the BSAP discovered that the army had no list of men who left their units never to return.⁴⁷

What, then, did it mean to stay in one's unit, to fight in this war? Jan Morris, for example, could not "imagine these people fighting to the last man, sacrificing their farms and factories, their very identity as a nation, rather than submit."⁴⁸ Dan Wylie, an RAR officer in the first months of

Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, wrote in his diary that he would serve in the army of an African government: “Personally, I’m fighting for a standard of life, if the government starts wrecking those standards, I’ll fight the government. Or go to Spain. Or something.”⁴⁹ Several of the chapters that follow argue that many soldiers continued to fight a war the conduct of which was not shaped by the military: these men organized their operations so they could poach elephants, or deployed a futile violence in gathering intelligence and then checking the intelligence held by other units (see chapters 4, 7, and 9). Other men who continued to fight either changed affiliations (rather than sides) or continued to fight for the same cause in another country (see chapters 4, 8, and 9).⁵⁰

How Did They Fight?

For the many years I was researching this book, I assumed it was impossible to fight a guerrilla war with an army of conscripts. I probably thought this because I am an American who came of age during the Vietnam War, which was fought with conscripts, but I had been repeating it until I had dinner with the founder of Rhodesia’s first tracking combat unit, who said, “You’ve been talking to too many regular soldiers.” Rhodesian conscripts, he insisted, brought skills to the army beyond those basic training could offer—these men were carpenters, apprentice electricians, mechanics, and hunters. They could follow spoor and shoot, and they could fix cars and dress wounds. These skills could translate into effective soldiering without much effort, although the skills of being a good shot or clever with machinery did not mean anyone wanted to be an effective soldier, or even shared commanders’ vision of what effective soldiering might be. Moreover, in many memoirs and novels, young national servicemen claimed they arrived in basic training already skilled. This is probably a common enough boast of young men in war, but in this case many national servicemen who had learned to shoot as teenagers did so at gun clubs with “jungle lanes,” which were so well known that I’ve only read one text that explains them. These lanes were narrow paths in which cardboard human figures (of no given color) popped up or descended from trees, so that youths could practice shooting them.⁵¹ Many men, especially those bought up on farms, knew how to track and shoot at least as well as their instructors; some of them trained their comrades on patrol (see chapter 4).

Did this mean that white soldiers arrived in depot already able to shoot and kill? And, if they did, did this mean they were willing to do so? Thinking of a group of people as so different that they are “less than human” has been thought to make killing easier.⁵² Did the young men who used racial epithets, told racist jokes, and believed in white rule want to eliminate the Africans who opposed them? Was their violence toward Africans arbitrary and extreme? Did they see Africans as less than human, like beasts or vermin, easily subject to the most extreme and arbitrary violence? There is ample evidence of Rhodesian soldiers animalizing Africans, especially Africans in the army’s employ. Africans were “natural” trackers, with preternatural hearing and sense of smell, who were able to see things in the wild that white men did not notice at all (see chapter 4). There were other African qualities—how they walked, how they stood still—that white soldiers were expected to mimic, however briefly, in pseudo gangs (see chapters 3 and 4). How do these practices and ideas fit with those of dehumanizing an enemy to make killing him easier? And what do these practices and ideas mean for my ability to locate the conduct of this war in broader histories of soldiering in the twentieth century?

In 1999 Joanna Bourke argued that soldiers describe killing not as a task they were forced to perform in wartime but as a source of joy and pride. Using evidence from twentieth-century wars, she claimed that men go to war in order to kill.⁵³ This book asks two questions of Bourke. First, is all talk of killing about killing? And, second, is killing the most important thing that goes on in a war? What would she make of Siegfried Sassoon’s account of going to his officers training course in France in 1916? On his way to lectures given “with homicidal eloquence,” he was keenly aware of the fine mornings and their fresh air. “I was like a boy going to school early, except no bell was ringing and, instead of carrying Virgil and Thucydides, I carried a gun. Forgetting, for a moment, that I was at the Front to be shot at, I could almost congratulate myself on having a holiday in France without paying for it.”⁵⁴ How does wanting to kill describe the 10 percent of the men of Reserve Battalion 101 in 1943 Poland who asked to be relieved of their orders to shoot Jews and load them onto transport trains instead? In 1943 they could have had no doubt about what would happen to these people when the trains reached their destinations, but they themselves did not want to kill them.⁵⁵ How does a desire to kill help us understand what Danny Hoffman calls “the dangerous terrain of conversation” he came to expect with every new group of *kamajors* he encountered in war-torn Sierra Leone and Liberia? The young men suggested anointing him with

magic water that would protect him from bullets; they would fire automatic weapons at him to prove it. An older man suggested boiling him for two days or smoking him for seven.⁵⁶

Do these examples mean that soldiers want to kill or that they don't want to kill? Stories of killing or boasts about wanting to kill may not actually be about killing. Hoffman, for example, did not think he was being threatened so much as he was being used as an example, a coded way to talk about ritual practices that served as lessons of their efficacy. The magic that gave these youths their power—the correct application of water or smoke—could only be disclosed in cryptic, allegorical terms: too much description gave away too many secrets. The conversations themselves were “a test of male bravado” for the kamajors and for Hoffman, but within that bravado are lessons, and how young men learn them, not wholly dissimilar to Sassoon's. Indeed, the fact of killing may not be what a soldier finds compelling about dead insurgents. When Chris Cocks, RLI, saw a guerrilla corpse for the first time, he wondered if dead soldiers from his regiment would look the same. He was shocked to see the more experienced soldiers on his patrol searched the bodies “like common thieves!” But when they found cash on a body—there were fabulous stories of finding thousands of dollars on the corpse of a guerrilla paymaster—it was divided equally among the patrol.⁵⁷

But what of men who speak of killing with pride? I quoted Dennis Croukamp earlier. He believed that professional soldiers want to face their enemies. Even so, he had his second confirmed kill in 1970. (A confirmed kill was one in which the source of the fire could be identified, hardly a straightforward task when artillery or automatic weapons are in use [see chapter 6]). He did not feel damaged by killing, but killing people in war-time changed his thinking about “shooting helpless wild animals. I never again shot another wild creature just for sport.” Croukamp insisted that the men who turned to drink or violence after a war would have done so without the war.⁵⁸

Is feeling good about killing after one has killed the same thing as wanting to kill? There is a conspicuous absence of trauma in the memoirs I cite in this book. This may be a convention of a specific genre (although I doubt it). It is entirely possible that the authors I cite saw the violence of wartime—especially the violence meted out toward Africans—as permissible and not worth commentary, or that automatic weapons and bombs made it easy to avoid thinking about having killed. It is equally possible that the absence of trauma may have been a more mundane example of

what Kenneth MacLeish discovered in his interviews with American veterans of multiple deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq. These soldiers resented the assumption of guilt and trauma. As wartime practices were increasingly medicalized, soldiers complained about the mental health assessments that followed their deployments. One soldier was asked if he dreamed of shooting people. “You don’t have to dream when you do it in real life,” he answered. What was traumatic, one retired veteran told MacLeish, was to be told by a social worker that he had done terrible things in combat and should feel guilty about them.⁵⁹ When men did experience postwar guilt, was it about killing in wartime or about postwar events witnessed in peacetime—the “what is happening *now*” Onslow and Berry heard so much about? White veterans of South Africa’s war in Namibia did not claim to be distressed by having killed, but by seeing the enemy they considered inferior now lauded as freedom fighters and elected to parliament.⁶⁰

Is it that soldiers want to have their actions judged on their own terms? Did they understand killing as a learned skill, a capability soldiers are trained to use wisely and well? The Scot Peter McAleese had been SAS, a perpetrator of domestic violence, and a mercenary before he joined the Rhodesian Army; he devoted a third of a chapter to a description of his first kill, when he served in Aden. “I felt good, I felt fit, I felt hard. This was the first time I had been in a contact and killed anyone. The euphoria was nothing to do with ending another person’s life. I felt good because I had not panicked, I had not let down my friends. I had reacted as a professional soldier trained by professional soldiers.” Competence, as in lessons learned, may be more important than the fact of killing. Still, the firefight was as exciting as anything he had ever done, he wrote, but then he was “a very aggressive young man.”⁶¹

What about men who shot but had no idea if their fire was lethal or even hit the mark? This is the terrain of confirmed kills. There is ample evidence, above and beyond S. L. A. Marshall’s classic *Men against Fire*, that not all soldiers shoot, even when ordered to do so. However contested the history of the text, and whatever methodological problems there were with Marshall’s research—published in 1947, the same year the Kalashnikov went into production—the book transformed infantry training. Men were trained to shoot on reflex; they were trained in conditions similar to those they would encounter in battle so that the sights and sounds of battlefield carnage would not distract a man from the task at hand. They were trained as McAleese was, to react, to shoot without panicking, to fire as a profes-

sional would. Training for battle, especially battle with automatic weapons, was not so much about training to kill but about inculcating in a body of knowledge that defined soldiers; it was to give men self-confidence in battle. Men who trained and deployed in small groups would be cohesive and loyal to each other. Tactics and weapons were to become instinctive reactions to sights and sounds. Camaraderie was a huge issue for Marshall, as it was for McAleese. Training was for not getting killed and not doing anything that might get a comrade killed.⁶²

Popular versions of this have emphasized killing, however, but perhaps incorrectly. The drills that supposedly “desensitized”—a term that sounds quaint in the twenty-first century—men to violence were also the drills that combated boredom. Bayonet practice and demonstrations of knife fighting were, in the training camps of Tanzania, designed to keep men engaged when there were no weapons to practice with.⁶³ Rhodesian military training did not seem focused on killing, however racist young white men were. The RLI, the largest and whitest infantry unit in the country that after 1976 had the largest intake of men, had seventeen weeks of basic training, including hours spent leopard crawling. Many recruits did not think they were learning skills needed in a guerrilla war; they found bayonet training embarrassing. National servicemen joked that they were learning “how to shoot, how to guard bridges, how to jump out of helicopters, really useful things like that.” Parachute instruction for commando units was described as “screaming, shouting, hitting, kicking.” Counterinsurgency training was essentially training in bushcraft: men had to learn how to survive in the wild for a week or more while tracking a guerrilla band. It was a few days of lectures about which berries were edible, which plants quenched thirst, and how to snare small animals. Specialized units like the Selous Scouts and the SAS had specialized selection courses and specialized training in isolated places—the Selous Scouts selection course was the ultimate version of this—but for national servicemen it seemed ridiculous. “What kind of army has to resort to that kind of bullshit?”⁶⁴

Let me return to Reserve Battalion 101, which shot past the men they were instructed to kill. Was this because they were uneasy about killing or because they were incompetent shots?⁶⁵ If men are trained to kill—however general or specific that training is—does not killing or not shooting accurately mean they were badly trained or that they were disobedient? For all his aggression, McAleese, then in the SAS, refused to kill an unarmed man who had wandered by his patrol as it prepared an ambush. The corporal ordered McAleese to shoot the man; he had seen the patrol laying

antipersonnel mines. He refused, saying, "If you want to kill him, do it yourself." The corporal repeated the order, and McAleese fired deliberately wide; the man ran off, and the gunshot compromised the ambush as much as the man would have done. McAleese did not think himself disobedient but professional and prudent: "I am keen to be the first to kill the enemy, especially in a fire fight but I have never been someone who could kill a civilian in cold blood."⁶⁶ Was this a question of context rather than one of desire? In 1978 a group of ZANLA fired on an RAR patrol outside Mount Selinda mission on a Saturday night. Because it was well known that ZANLA frequented the girls' dormitories there, the patrol did not return fire for fear of shooting young civilians. Would unwillingness to kill an unarmed civilian apply to an armed civilian? A. J. Balaam led a Selous Scouts patrol into Mozambique in 1976, hoping to gather intelligence on guerrilla movements. They identified a man who could help them, but they could neither coax nor coerce him to leave his homestead. When the man picked up a fallen branch and attacked the African Selous Scouts, the patrol responded with bayonets and guns. The man ran off. Balaam hoped he survived, not because he did not want a civilian killed by his patrol but because "he was a brave man and deserved to live."⁶⁷

Who deserves to live and who deserves to die? There were worthy foes, of course (see chapter 6), but there were also automatic weapons and bombing raids that made it impossible to see how any foe died or who killed him. Leonard Smith has argued that novels rather than memoirs contain stories of killing. The displacements of the third person and fiction allow for easier descriptions.⁶⁸ This war may be different precisely because of the landscape. ZIPRA recruits from the western part of the country had to cross the Zambezi River for training in Zambia, and ZIPRA guerrillas had to cross the river again to infiltrate Rhodesia: they called it "the first enemy," as they risked rapids and attacks by crocodiles.⁶⁹ Indeed, Rhodesian war novels contain powerful scenes of death by nature. In one novel, a seriously wounded guerrilla calls out that he wants to surrender, that he has information for Special Branch, but he is killed and eaten by a hyena.⁷⁰ In another, a Rhodesian soldier turned poacher is attacked by a buffalo. The game ranger hero saves him but is himself killed by a bull elephant he has distracted from charging the industrialist who wants to flood the game park.⁷¹ In another novel a crocodile emerges from the Zambezi to kill the guerrilla about to shoot a case-hardened Special Branch. "This is Zimbabwe," the guerrilla says. "Rhodesia is dead." At the end of the novel the Special Branch chases a guerrilla leader to Victoria Falls, where the

man desperately clings to the rock face only to be swept away by the raging Zambezi River. The questions of context and desire troubled the Special Branch: “I knew I didn’t want him to die . . . this way. A quick bullet, a rope, these he deserved.”⁷²

I argue that when the landscape kills, soldiering—at least soldiering in the head—is situated in place. Knowledge of flora and fauna and river currents was the time-honored means of warfare in the country; it may have been more important than accurate fire or obedience. The specificity and power of place—and the knowledges that Africans could impart to whites about that place—shaped the history of the conduct of this war. I do not mean that this war should be studied in isolation from other wars, especially since guerrilla armies were keenly aware of nationalist struggles elsewhere, but I will argue that knowledge of place, of plants and animals and rivers and gorges, is critical to the study of counterinsurgency.

Discipline and Morale

Many national servicemen’s memoirs describe incident after incident of disobedience and distrust. Was this because they were well trained but rebellious, poorly trained, or just disobedient? In the years of massive conscription and the years of fighting a no-win war, it may have been hard to tell and harder to discipline. There were men who never learned to shoot well and did not show up for extra target practice, and there were men who mocked military protocol: they wore their own shoes on patrol, they did not wear their uniforms when it was required, they sunbathed when they were ordered to keep all their clothes on, or they wore regimental insignia to thumb their noses at regulations. There were reservists who did not care enough about a patrol or the war to show up, and there were memoirists who celebrated their casual disobedience. It is possible to read some of the following chapters as portraying youthful exuberance and embodied, adolescent humor. It is also possible to read this material as accounts by men who were actively disobedient and who destroyed equipment. In 1974, for example, the armorer for the Tenth Rhodesia Regiment threatened to report men if they continued to use the magazines on their automatic weapons to open bottles.⁷³ At the end of 1976 the minister of defence came to announce the extension of national service to eighteen months to a Rhodesia Regiment platoon that was about to stand down. The men shouted obscenities as he spoke. That evening, after prodigious drinking during which one of



1.1 Recce patrol, Kayemba, 1978. Courtesy of Chas Lotter.

them acquired a handgun—no one remembered how—a few of the men approached the minister in a nearby hotel in a way that made his bodyguards draw their weapons. They were not disciplined.⁷⁴ After General Walls announced the internal settlement to an RLI barracks, a MAG gunner removed the strap of his 20-kg belted machine gun and threw it at the general's feet. "If you're going to give it to the kaffirs, sir, you can get a kaffir to carry this." Walls murmured that he understood.⁷⁵ In the last years of the war, young RAR officers complained about how often they were sent on patrol with faulty intelligence; they had to rewrite their orders into something more pragmatic and tactical.⁷⁶ In a photograph of a recce patrol—men skilled in tracking and counterinsurgency—from Kanyemba on the border with Mozambique in 1978, one can see the uniforms, the deadpan expressions, and two men standing in the middle of the group. One is barefoot and holds a beer bottle, and the man next to him is exposing himself: camaraderie, disobedience, and morale in a single image.

Did anyone object or complain about such behavior? I have been told by several former officers that by the late 1970s there were many regiments "doing their own thing," which I have taken to mean that centralized command structures were weak. This suggests that the power of various regiments and individual patrols and even of soldiers was easily amplified. The

the Selous Scouts, for example, overruled Special Branch interrogators as to which guerrilla was turned, and many of the auxiliaries trained by Special Branch were killed by regular army (see chapters 3 and 9). Did anyone call such actions inefficient?

Writing of World War I, Leonard Smith has argued that command is an inadequate way to think about military orders: rank-and-file soldiers have the power to obey or disobey. They negotiate: the orders they follow and which ones they ignore are decided by consent and consensus, not command.⁷⁷ I do not want to draw a straight line between a French battalion in World War I and Rhodesian conscripts sixty years later, but this may clarify much of what is included in this book. If the overall strategy of the war was to allow Rhodesia a strong bargaining position in an eventual negotiated settlement, was there any reason to discipline reservists changing their orders? Did anyone complain about drunken threats, or Selous Scouts declaring large areas off-limits to other security forces? None of this is resistance—and certainly not resistance as most African historians understand the term—but is whatever happens when a stonemason, finished with his national service and on his third tour of reserve duty, assumes he can write orders as well as his officers did, or when the leader of a pseudo gang takes a prisoner on patrol against the orders of his interrogators. This isn't exactly disinterest, but it's not an interest in fighting the war either. The disobedience was casual. There were no mutinies beyond Coloured, Asian, and Eurasian (CAE) soldiers refusing to parade at depot in 1973; they demanded equal pay with white soldiers.⁷⁸ There was virtually no fragging—and that was something I have asked about. In 1979 a white officer was killed by hastily trained African volunteers and a 2RAR officer was “accidentally” shot dead when he staggered back to camp after an afternoon of drinking. But to repeat a question I asked earlier in this section, was this an accident, disobedience, or the result of too many beers?⁷⁹ My point here is that if the war was fought as a holding action, did soldiers, on the ground, do more? I am not saying that Rhodesian security forces fought badly: they rarely lost a contact, and they fought well, with great skill and camaraderie. But they did not win, even in the years when ZANLA and ZIPRA were in turmoil.

The frequent militarization of urban spaces in wartime was hardly unique to Rhodesia, however; elsewhere, this militarization has been shown to change the gender dynamics of city life.⁸⁰ But in Rhodesia it was further proof of the idea of disillusioned, violent soldiers fighting everyone but guerrillas, an idea that took hold by 1979. David Cauter visited Rhodesia

frequently while writing for the *New Statesman* and *The Observer*. He was an astute and eloquent observer, and I cite him often, but his description of young soldiers' indiscipline and fury in the last year of the war both defies credibility and reveals a popular sense of soldiers out of control. He called the violence of young servicemen "endemic." A bar manager and British Army veteran claimed he had been all over the world and never saw "behavior like this." Caute claimed, incorrectly, that Salisbury bars closed on Saturday afternoon and that bars had hotlines direct to the military police: "Calling the civilian police wasn't much use: the psychotic servicemen merely took them on."⁸¹

Bar manager veterans notwithstanding, none of this was true. Bars did indeed close every afternoon but reopened a few hours later; if men still had drinks on their tables, they were not asked to leave while the bar was closed. The "civilian police" was made up of as many national servicemen as the army was. I am not concerned with the accuracy of this story as much as I am about why it was told in mid-1979. Minority rule was over and done with, whatever the outcome of the war. Many memoirs from 1978 and 1979 describe the futility of continued patrols and the exhaustion of young men. Did stories of drunken soldiers attacking police and civilians and each other take hold in 1979 to show that they understood how pointless the war was? "The lads," a young soldier in the army's psychological action (PsyAc) unit told Caute as he held his palm level with his nose, "have had it up to here."⁸²

This War, This Book

In an effort to make sure no soldier inadvertently revealed sensitive information, PsyAc issued graffiti-style stickers to be placed in urinals in towns and operational areas. There were sixty different messages, including the drop-shaped "Are you having a security leak?" There was the mouth-shaped "Don't give lip service to terrorism" and the lip-shaped "Women's lib is one thing, women's lip another." A few skirted homosexual desire: "Have you got a Mao Tse Tongue?" "Your tongue could pull a trigger." "An open mouth makes a big target."⁸³

This is not a book about the multiple meanings of stickers found in toilets, although it is worth asking how PsyAc arrived at these phrases, but it does seek to acknowledge the military's commentaries on soldiers and their soldiering. I also look to soldiers' memoirs to provide commentaries

on soldiers and their soldiering. I have often asked former soldiers what makes this or that memoir ring true. Sometimes I was told it was the description of tracking or shooting, but most often it was the description of practical jokes: “We were great pranksters.”⁸⁴ It was a war of young, white men together in the intimate spaces of barracks and patrols in a countryside that was now dangerous. There were what I think were typical references to private fantasies—the woman who played soldiers’ requests on the Rhodesian radio talked of the damage the war was doing to their right hands—but the social life of the war was homosocial. It was also young, at least for national servicemen, and the clever ideas from PsyAc and the war memoirs I cite are sometimes painfully adolescent.⁸⁵ It was a war of some fighting, to be sure, but also a war of pranks and jokes performed for an audience of like-minded young men.

This book has two entangled narrative arcs. These are a history of counterinsurgency strategies and practices in the Rhodesian forces, and the writings of former Rhodesian soldiers. The history of counterinsurgency practices is broadly chronological; the history of war memoirs has an unstable chronology, as a great many of these memoirs reflect and engage with other soldiers’ memoirs while a few publish revised memoirs (see chapter 2). As chapters 2 and 3 show, counterinsurgency practices were most often imaginaries of hearth and home, and how desirable it was to bring Africans into those spaces, preferably as servants. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are about counterinsurgency and the reverence accorded pseudo gangs and white men masquerading as Africans. These practices are those of intimacy, of white operatives dependent on Africans to teach them to walk and talk like Africans: their description in memoirs celebrated the fictions of no one really knowing who was who. The idea of successful masquerade and crossing boundaries seeped into questions of how authorship was determined and the conventions by which copyright was to be allocated. Chapters 6 and 7 are about weapons and how they were imagined both by the Rhodesian war project and by the Rhodesian war memoir project. Guns were symbolic of and in the struggle—see any number of images of a silhouetted AK-47—and Rhodesians followed the genealogy of weapons with great care and admiration during the war. Insurgents had insisted for years that they were poisoned by security forces—in their food, in their drink, and in their shoes—but biological and chemical weapons are commonplace only in memoirs and postwar writing. Were these practices so secret that they could only be revealed after Rhodesia ceased to exist, or was there a merging of the idioms of African ideas about harming

and Rhodesian ideas about the ingenuity and courage of their war effort? Chapters 8 and 9 return to the linked issues of manpower and counterinsurgency. If pseudo gangs and tracking units required specific Rhodesian skills, a knowledge of a specific wild learned from Africans, foreign soldiers who came to defend white men or prevent another Vietnam undermined this. Whatever Rhodesians imagined about Cubans or Russians poised to invade, foreign soldiers in the Rhodesian Army made this war more ambiguous, less about a specific place and its people and more about its slogans. Chapter 9 describes the last years of the war and the last years of trying to find enough men to fight it. As coups and countercoups shaped ZIPRA and ZANLA and as Zimbabwe-Rhodesia took shape, special forces trained security force auxiliaries. Some were former guerrillas, some were trained in other countries, and some had no political or military interests whatsoever. Large groups of soldiers did not enhance the war effort, however. They were considered liabilities, too incompetent or too violent to continue fighting, so that in the last months of the war they were killed off, frequently by the same small group units they were designed to replace.

My use of memoirs and other published material in this book is messy, not because of a sloppy method on my part but because these memoirs have untidy provenances and muddled reliabilities. Are the stories written by former soldiers and officials true or false? Were they someone else's story passed off as one's own? Were they stories told and retold in countless bars before a final version was committed to paper? Given the number of memoirs I use in this book, and the more than thirty-year span in which they were published, I suggest these questions do not matter. Instead, I want readers to understand these stories as those former Rhodesian soldiers believed they should tell them: these are stories, taken together, that debate and disagree about what it was like to fight this war.