

TRACKING IN THE RHODESIAN ARMY

Captain Allan Savory, TCU (TF)

Any book about the Scouts would be incomplete without some reference to its earliest origins and how the Rhodesian Army became the first army we knew of to train army trackers as opposed to employing native or indigenous trackers, as the British did in Malaya and Borneo, with the Senoi Praaq and the Sarawak Rangers. To understand how the Rhodesian Army became the first to train and use army trackers, rather than recruiting local native trackers, I need to go back to explaining why my thinking was so different from that of my fellow officers. I grew up during the Second World War, fiercely proud of the role of Rhodesians in various theatres and could think of little but joining the army at the first opportunity. I could foresee at least twenty years of peace ahead of us and I did not want to be a peacetime soldier. Vaguely I could foresee a different kind of warfare emerging after that – guerilla warfare.

I therefore opted for a career in the Colonial Service in the then Northern Rhodesian Game Department. Over the following years I read everything I could about guerrilla campaigns around the world throughout history. In the Game Department I had close friends who had served with Peacock Force, a unit of XIV Army behind the Japanese lines - Major W.E. Poles, MC and Captain Frank Ansell - and I befriended an agricultural officer, Bill Verboom, who had fought with the Border Scouts in Borneo against Sukarno. These friends were pumped mercilessly for information - tactics, strategies, political control or influence and more - as I was determined to understand guerrilla warfare in depth and not merely from a military perspective.

In the bush doing my Game Department job catching poachers and hunting problem elephants, hippo and lion, I began perfecting my own bush skills. Earlier I had trained myself to track and took to it like a duck to water. But it was here, having to hunt many man-eating lions that I found I needed to become really proficient because native trackers did not share my enthusiasm for closing with our opponents in dense bush. I noted that as fear increased with proximity to the lion, trackers would find tracks harder to see and then, mysteriously, we all too often lost the spoor. Thus, after endless circling till we had obliterated any tracks, we would trudge back to camp while yet another person got eaten.

After a few such episodes I realised I simply had to become a better tracker myself. Being fanatical, as so many of us are at that age, I spent endless hours simply determined to be the best I could in all aspects of bush craft and certainly to match any native tracker. During this time I learned that there is far more to tracking than following signs on the ground. It is essential to get into the mind of your quarry - animal or man; to know why they are doing what they are doing and what they are thinking and likely to do next. This mental picture is steadily built while following the tracks and confirming, or changing, the picture being formed. Constant interpretation combined with the signs read from soil, plants, litter, insect and other creature tracks, spiderwebs, wind, dew, sun angle as well as surrounding noises, and more, builds a picture in the tracker's mind essential to success.

Years later, our first successful tracking to contact with army trackers was a classic case of mind-reading rather than simply following signs. A group of guerillas had shot up a South African Police camp near the Zambezi and made good their escape. At the time I commanded the Tracker Combat Unit (TCU) and assigned a tracker team to follow them. However, I also decided to accompany the team, as we needed a success after a series of setbacks. From the anti-tracking measures the gang was taking I recognised above-average skill. Their skill and the difficult nature of the escarpment we were following them in, made me decide to take over the tracking.

After a couple of hours of difficult tracking the gang made its way down a rocky bit of ground toward the Zambezi as though to escape across the river. However, while tracking them I had worked out that they were more likely to simply shake us off in the difficult country and remain in the area. With this picture in mind, I held back when they went down a rocky incline in the direction of the river where no sign would be apparent for some distance. Looking around, I noticed off to one side a single dry grass stem bent at a right angle to their path onto the rocks. After reflecting on the significance of that one bent dry stem, I changed our direction and within ten minutes we heard low muffled voices and had them located. That one carelessly bent stem and a good feel for how they were moving to shake us off spelled their doom.

I whispered instructions to Lieutenant Paul Coetzee, giving him five minutes to get around them undetected in case they made a run for it. I stalked in close to assure myself that it was in fact the gang and not a group of civilian poachers before opening fire. No weapons were obvious and four men in civilian clothes were huddled together, talking softly. Because of their civilian dress I went in closer till at a few yards I was able to see the collar of a camouflage jacket under the coat of the man closest to me. Having the confirmation needed, I opened fire. Tracker Duckworth who was a little way behind me fired at a second man while the others immediately grabbed their weapons but it was all over in seconds. To me it was a classical track, stalk and identification situation that I wished we could duplicate over and over but life and war are not like that.

Over the years of tracking I came to understand that although we could train many men to track well in that they could follow a difficult spoor, it was only a few exceptional people who would think like their quarry. We constantly strived for this ideal and we did achieve it with a few men, both black and white.

Like most young Rhodesians, I was a Territorial posted after training at Llewellyn Barracks to 2nd Battalion Royal Rhodesia Regiment in Northern Rhodesia. However, when the Nyasaland Emergency occurred in 1959 I bluffed my way into the 1st Battalion, using the pretext of speaking Chinyanja. I said I was a sergeant but they had no record of me in the Battalion. I accused the army of sloppiness in losing my file and was in Nyasaland when they exposed my crime but gave me the rank for initiative. While serving in Nyasaland I learned that although our troops were of excellent quality with an amazing array of skills, coming as they did from all walks of life, their bush craft left much to be desired. They were also arrogant, which is not conducive to learning. So one

night after I had posted eight men as guards around a school, I stripped and quietly visited them all. Four of the eight had a bayonet in their ribs before they even knew I was there. After that there was less arrogance and it was very hard to approach any of them undetected.

When we returned from Nyasaland where half of my platoon was involved in the Nkata Bay tragedy under Hugh van Oppen (later a mercenary killed in the Congo), I began in earnest to try to get the army to train seriously for the warfare that it was now obvious we would face.

I had by this time transferred to the Southern Rhodesian Game Department and had also been commissioned in the newly formed 4th Battalion RRR. We seemed to be on almost constant call-up trying to prevent black-on-black violence as the African nationalist parties vied for power. We white Rhodesians were seldom the targets of the violence at that stage. In 1960 I wrote a memorandum to Sir Roy Welensky, Prime Minister of the Federation, urging that we train our Federal Army for guerilla warfare, including training army trackers. Years later he was to become a close friend and advisor when I led the Rhodesia Party in opposition to the Rhodesian Front of Ian Smith. One day I asked Sir Roy why he had turned down my request and he told me he had been advised to disregard it by the army, which was an understandable reaction from regular officers.

Tragically, resistance remained strong among regular officers. I well recall General Jock Anderson visiting our mess and deliberately talking loudly in my hearing about 'f.... ing young officers who wanted to form private armies'.

Realising the degree of opposition, I decided that I would have to penetrate army thinking step by acceptable step if I was to succeed, starting with survival, going on to tracking and hopefully to full acceptance of the need for the army to understand guerrilla warfare. When the Federal Army began expanding, C Squadron SAS was duly formed and stationed in Ndola. Not all regulars were hostile to my ideas and I was invited by the SAS to lecture on survival. Building on the acceptance of these talks, I found officers sympathetic to the idea of short survival courses in Dombashawa. While resistant to learning about guerrilla warfare, the army readily accepted that men might benefit from greater survival skills when lost in the bush.

Finally, after much frustration came the lucky break that was to change everything and clear the way for more serious training. The 4th Battalion, breaking the routine of riot drill, was now training at least for anti-terrorist warfare and we held an exercise in the Puckle Hills near Nkomo. We officers were briefed that four gangs of 'bandits' (kindly provided by the RLI) were known to have entered the area of many square miles of rugged country and it was our Battalion's task to hunt them down over the next few days. At the end of the briefing the Colonel asked if we had any questions. I did and asked, 'Why are we committing a Battalion to this task and thus playing right into the hands of the enemy?'. The Colonel asked what I thought was needed and I replied, 'A section or, at most, a platoon'. The Colonel and my fellow officers had a field day shooting me down in ridicule and flame.

Later that evening in the mess I approached the Colonel and said that although he had enjoyed poking fun at me, I was serious enough to challenge him. He showed interest, so I proposed a competition between the Battalion and me. If he would release me to operate on my own, I would give him five pounds for every bandit leader the Battalion caught if he would do the same for me. On this we shook hands and off I went with the code name 'Sapphire' (she had the evening before put on a strip act for the Battalion). To cut a long story short the Battalion never did catch all bandit groups but by the end of the second day I had caught all of the bandits and the Colonel sportingly paid up. What clinched matters was the openness of one person, Digger Essex Clark, our regular training Major. Digger was gracious enough to say he had never seen or heard of anything quite like it: where one man could outperform an entire battalion. From then on I got what I had been pleading for: an almost blank cheque to start more serious training of the regular army, although still not on guerrilla warfare as I desired.

I was fairly quickly able to get approval to use the Zambezi Valley as a training ground and the SAS, which was showing great interest, arranged for me to begin longer courses. I notched these up from survival to what I called aggressive bush craft, where I could take the step from tracking to tactics in such warfare. Aggressive bush craft was acceptable because it implied a more positive mindset than mere survival.

In 1964 I left the Game Department because my scientific work was meeting with even stronger opposition from official quarters than my military thinking. This work involved new ideas to address land degradation, a major underlying cause of social breakdown, poverty and violence for centuries. I went farming and game ranching to support myself while doing all I could to keep working with the SAS. Political clouds were darkening and, following the granting of independence to Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Ian Smith made his all too well-known Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Tragically, the Rhodesian Front (RF) interfered with the command structure of the security forces and General Sam Putterill and Air Vice-Marshal Hawkins, who were opposed to UDI, were replaced with politically compliant officers, which led to the security forces backing the RF's illegal action instead of standing by our oath as officers to defend our nation and constitution.

To me civil war was now inevitable and emotions were fanning the flames. One evening shortly after UDI in the 4th Battalion mess the Colonel had all officers stand and snap the crowns off our Royal Rhodesia Regiment badges as we were now going to go it alone. As I had two badges I did so but kept the other which to this day is still on my bush hat in my study as I write.

Following UDI the training I had done with C Squadron ended with all the officers I knew leaving the army rather than throwing in their lot with the illegal government of Rhodesia.

Knowing that the war could only expand, I put my heart and soul into at least doing all I could from my very junior position to enable the army to hold the situation till there was

some political solution. It was time now to go deeper than aggressive bush craft training and to train seriously for guerilla warfare if I could get approval. Accordingly, I presented a paper to Army HQ asking to be allowed to train what I called Guerrilla Anti-Terrorist Units (GATU) to be made up of mixed race teams from the SAS, Special Branch and the CID. After some discussion this was agreed, as was the fact that GATU would remain top secret. I was to deal with General Andy Rawlins and Crabtree at Special Branch. No others were to know of our activities.

The first of our GATU candidates were selected by the re-forming SAS, as well as Special Branch and the CID. In due course, in 1965 if I recall, a couple of Sabre Land Rovers arrived outside my home in Bulawayo and out stepped Lieutenants Brian Robinson and another, two of the new SAS officers, with some of their men. Brian was to become a lifelong comrade-in-arms and friend. We then traveled to a very remote area, picking up the police contingent as we went. So began the GATU training, which I chose to do in the lower Sabi River area which was not populated and which I knew well, having lived there in 1959. We were given our own codes for radio communication that only SAS signalers could decipher and we went underground.

My idea was to train mixed race groups to be able to operate either in the country or across the border as pseudo-gangs, like in Kenya during the Mau Mau Emergency. On operations we whites were blackened with special dye produced for us. We used enemy weapons and equipment. I was still trying to give our army a deeper understanding of guerrilla warfare and hoped to take the next step through GATU to go deeper than the thinking behind Kenya's use of pseudo-gangs. However, although the army had, by our officers not upholding our oaths to constitution and country, become a party political tool, I found regulars would not discuss politics and I never did succeed. The furthest I could go was to train GATU to operate as guerilla gangs so that they would be better equipped to deal with guerilla gangs. We could, in my view, only deal with the symptom but not the cause and so were still doomed to defeat. The initial training and selection of each group of recruits took place over a month without a day off. Days were broken into tracking, anti-tracking, survival and tactics. From each intake I rejected some while selecting the best that I could to use as instructors to assist me with the next intake.

We ended each month with a four-day exercise splitting the new GATU members into four-man gangs. Each gang was given a map with some marked spots that they had to visit at certain times. Each gang's RVs were different and unknown to other groups but ensured gangs would cross one another's tracks at some point. I deliberately selected a large, dry area of the wildest bush. Each man was allowed only a knife as a weapon. One gang was given a silenced .22 rifle but no ammunition. Other gangs were given ammunition but no rifle. Each man started with an empty waterbottle and no food, matches or any comforts. No compasses or other aids to navigation were permitted as the men were trained not to get lost. The rules were simple – just win. That meant live, do not be ambushed and end up 'killing' the other gangs and taking what you wanted from them.

I also stipulated that a team had to get to all its RVs no matter what tragedy hit them. If anyone could not make it, ditch him. If anyone got lost, leave him. Visit each position on time, track down any gangs leaving any signs and take whatever you like including any food, water or clothing the captured team had. Leave them naked to carry on. They knew I would be in the area also living the same way, but unseen by them and watching and tracking the teams down to learn what they were up to. I really wanted to know how aggressive and determined the men were and think that in many ways this process sorted out weaklings perhaps better than the SAS selection.

There was still a major problem for me and that was the reluctance of any regulars, police or SAS, to talk politics in any way while we were fighting an unwinnable political war. One evening in camp when the regular army and police officers were discussing the war and the enemy, I tested the water by saying I was not sure who the enemy was: Smith or Mugabe. That went down like a lead balloon and subsequently I kept to the military side of operations while with the regular army. Some years later I was to get confirmation that the black police members of the teams were not as apolitical as whites thought. So that we could not be given away, we did not want officers saluted or treated in any different way and therefore had all men regardless of rank use native nicknames. The black team members came up with the names for each white member. Africans are well known for giving nicknames that are very apt and descriptive of either a white man's features or his behaviour. I was given the name Chimurenga which, as people now know, was the name for the various wars against whites in the country's history. When I asked why they had chosen that name, the reply was telling. They said, 'You are constantly teaching us how to wage guerilla warfare for peaceful ends, but no man can know so much about war unless he is himself warlike'.

Some years later, while I was working across the border to try to bring an end to the war and salvage what I could of our army, I first met Mugabe and General Tongogara on neutral ground. Initially they were extremely hostile. They refused to shake hands and asked to question me. I found they were aware of my role and my GATU name and they blamed me for most of the casualties they had suffered at the hands of both the Selous Scouts and SAS. While they clearly exaggerated my role, it did indicate that black members of our GATUs must have been informing them because that name was never known or used other than in GATU.

As was bound to happen, difficulties arose in the GATU concept with the close working relationship it required between army and police, and so GATU was disbanded. Our first GATU operation was fortunately also our last. I say this as we were operating in the rough hilly country south of Kariba and Army HQ had attached a new regular officer who had served with pseudo-gangs in Kenya. For me it was awkward as he outranked me and as a TF captain my position was by no means clear. It was not long before this officer raised the subject of handling accidental discovery. He asked for us to agree that, if accidentally discovered by a civilian, black or white, we should kill whoever discovered us, disguising the murder as an atrocity by the other side. He pointed out the obvious: that we would be on our own with government and army denial of any involvement or protection. Rather than have a showdown with a regular officer over something totally

unacceptable to me, I let it pass but resolved that I would prevent it should we be discovered, which thankfully we never were. Apparently, the lesson learnt from the brutal handling of civilians by the Nazi SS behind the Wehrmacht lines when Russia was invaded had not penetrated army thinking.

Later we were to engage in further such stupidity in this form of warfare with the use of minefields and enclosed settlements that amounted to concentration camps. Tragically, I was to expose the first atrocity by security forces when two South African Policemen operating in Rhodesia cut the throat of a baby when the mother could not, or would not, answer their questions. To my dismay, the whole affair was being hushed up by both the South African and Smith governments so I arranged for it to be raised in Parliament by the African members to give the Minister of Defense an opportunity to clear the good name of Rhodesian forces, which he chose not to do.

With the dissolution of GATU the police went on to form PATU (Police Anti-Terrorist Units) that served well but bore little relation to the original ideal. The SAS went it alone but kept up training trackers through the formation of the Tracking Wing of the School of Infantry at Kariba. I believed we were still missing out on some of the best bush men in the Territorials as I employed a number of them in my game-ranching business and in fact had taken some, like Daryl Watt who served so well in the SAS, straight from school and employed them as hunters. With the dissolution of GATU, I requested permission to recruit Territorials and to form a TF Tracker Combat Unit. Permission was granted and I was given recruiting priority throughout the TF battalions. Shortly thereafter the TCU became reality.

The role I foresaw for the TCU was internal intelligence gathering and tracking of guerillas crossing into Rhodesia, while the SAS would handle external operations across our borders. The original members of the TCU were mostly men I recruited from the game-ranching company I ran, where I employed them as hunters, or from the Game Department. The first task was to make trackers of these men who had always used native trackers, and then to teach them tactics and strategy.

Trackers worked in four-man teams with each man being a competent tracker. The tracker was followed by the controller of the entire team who also had the radio. The other two men, known as flankers, usually stayed well out to the sides and well ahead of the tracker. While the tracker kept on the tracks, his flankers had two tasks: to detect ambushes and to pick up the tracks if they deviated to either side. If a flanker picked up the track deviating, he signaled and immediately became the tracker while the former tracker swung out to replace that flanker. Only in extremely dense bush, where noise made by flankers would outweigh the advantage of their positions, would one or both temporarily pull in behind the controller.

Flankers had another role in a new way I devised to quickly pick up lost tracks. On losing the tracks the tracker, who had been taught not to overshoot the last sign (the most common mistake), signaled that he had lost the track. The controller immediately became the centre of a large circle and stood still as a marker. The flankers also stood while the

tracker, thinking like those he was following, checked out the most likely places he (and thus they) would have gone. If he did not immediately pick up the tracks, he would signal and continue searching likely spots, but the flankers would begin a circle with the controller as the centre of the search circle. Flankers then looked for the 'line' of signs that would be at right angles to them. The controller maintained his central position to ensure a full circle in case of our opponents doubling back as so often happened. Commonly, native trackers would simply start circling in front of the last signs, which is fine when tracking game but not elusive humans.

I decided against the use of dogs in tracker teams, as used in Kenya. I had used dogs in my Game Department days and was using highly trained dogs in my game ranching operations and had found they presented problems. They required more water and food, were noisy in dense bush and, being bred for scenting power rather than hardiness, their feet were too sensitive for the extremely hot ground. Commonly they simply moved from shade or litter-covered soil to the next cool place. In addition, they tended to obliterate tracks, making tracking harder on difficult ground.

As total silence was our greatest security and element of surprise, I was ruthless about anything that made any noise. Even if a slight noise could not be heard by the enemy, it could be heard by the tracker and flankers and was thus distracting. To achieve silence I would not allow any covering of our legs. No items of webbing were permitted to protrude to the side of a man's body. There were to be no rattles of any sort. To communicate we used a combination of hand signals and silent dog whistles because skilled opponents would be expecting us to use bird or animal noises. Each team tuned these whistles to the hearing of the man with the lowest tonal range. The combination of silent whistles and hand signs was usually all we needed. One other rule I applied ruthlessly was that no man could have a half-full water bottle. Only empty or full bottles were allowed. My reasons were twofold. Firstly, a half-full bottle made a constant noise. Secondly, as we were often thirsty and short of water, it was demoralising to hear water sloshing and took the tracker's mind off the job.

The TCU was soon identified by the bandoliers across our chests. These we designed to carry our food because the army webbing was too noisy in thorny brush. In each pouch the men could put whatever food suited them most and one bandolier could last for a week, supplemented by bush foods. This led to my making a fool of myself on one occasion when I was operating with the SAS across the border. I did not have my bandoliers and so decided to rely on newly produced test rations produced by the South Africans for testing in Rhodesia. We called these Tarzan bars as each bar was supposed to be a fully balanced and filling meal. I packed them into my pouches and took no other food, as normally this amount would have been adequate. I had not banked on the mixture being inedible after hours in the sun. I literally could not hold them down and wanted to throw up when I smelled or saw them. For some days I had a prisoner attached to me with a piece of para cord and shared everything I had with him, as he was famished. After half a bar he also spat the rest out, apparently preferring to die. I ended up having little option to keep my prisoner and myself alive but to scrounge from the SAS troops, which did not endear me to them.

Strict silence was our best guarantee of locating ambushes before we were seen. Although we usually had support troops following us, we had to keep them some way back because they were so noisy and to forbid them to use radios till we called. Having the comfort of support troops, whose noise caused us to be ambushed was not useful to us. I preferred to avoid being ambushed. I reasoned that our most likely losses of trackers would be due to mines or ambushes. As we could only be mined or ambushed where we were expected, we trained at all times never to go where we could be expected. Thus I would make no camps to return to, allow no man who left equipment to return and discouraged movement on paths. Should any man ever be captured and forced to lead his captors to us, we would be warned as the moving party always had to reveal his presence first. Should he be compromised, he would have his weapon in his left hand.

I had also to train the trackers to be aware of bush sounds and their meaning. Thus they had to recognise the first chirp of a honey guide, no matter what they were preoccupied with at the time, and to take note as soon as beetles, frogs and birds went silent. To ensure silence, I had the teams constantly tracking another team which had gone ahead as the 'enemy' and would at some point be lying in ambush. It was the tracker team's task to detect the ambush first at all times, or be shot at. Initially, we used live rounds fired close to the tracker's feet but I found they eventually ignored live rounds knowing they would not be shot. So I replaced live rounds with powerful catapults shooting the trackers with the full intent of hurting them. The stones came hard and fast and would shatter on the magazine of a rifle. That kept trackers alert for hours no matter how hot or tired.

Getting lost in the bush is always a danger. To overcome this fear with the trackers who often came from city backgrounds, I used to have them memorise the major drainage pattern of any area they operated in. Thereafter, if they were ever lost, they simply walked downhill, which would always lead to a rivercourse and eventually some human presence or road. I also used to test the men to determine who had natural instincts for direction as this varies a great deal between people. We tested by blindfolding each man and leading him all over the place on an overcast day in dense bush. Then after removing the blindfold, we would ask him to point out the direction of various places we had been to over the previous days. Some pointed all over the place while a few were amazingly consistent and accurate.

Trackers were also taught anti-tracking which meant being able to cover the ground, leaving no signs. We had the army produce special canvas hockey boots for the trackers with soles that left almost no sign and a lot less than a barefoot man. These soles I designed using ideas from elephant feet that leave remarkably little sign for their size and the weight of the animal.

With experience, the men would finally realise that if you do need to shake people off it is not only a matter of not leaving easy-to-follow tracks, but also of going faster than your trackers can. Most inexperienced men would waste time trying to avoid leaving tracks. The hardest to track was an experienced tracker keeping to ground that he knew was difficult tracking and moving fast, preferably in daylight. Night movement always

left more sign. For this reason when we had to steal water from a waterpoint dominated by an enemy camp, I would sneak in at midday and not at night.

Apart from being skilled and silent trackers we needed to be above average at fast shooting in dense bush. Toward this end I trained the men to shoot with both eyes open and to point and shoot to sight or sound. I had learned the trick of training men to fire accurately at sound from my Dutch friend mentioned earlier who fought in Borneo.

We did a lot of jungle range-work to perfect rapid accurate shooting and arranged for a number of invisible targets with a rattle behind them forcing men to identify the source of sound quickly and hit it. To help men learn to shoot with two eyes open, I provided a silenced .22 with unlimited ammunition but the sights blocked off between the foresight and the muzzle. In this manner one eye could line up the sights but not see the target while the other could only see the target. The rifle was at a convenient spot with small swinging targets and anyone relaxing was encouraged to shoot and compete.

I did not believe in using sentries for several reasons. It prevented men from getting enough sleep if a small team had to post sentries. For any sentry to remain alert for a long time is also incredibly difficult. So in our teams we simply gathered as though to camp and as soon as it was dark we scattered with a pre-arranged RV for next morning. We usually slept hidden in the bush in pairs to try to avoid snoring giving us away. On one occasion I found our enemy were doing the same because, after doing a recce of one of their camps and finding it empty, I walked into one of them in pitch-darkness sleeping in the bush.

Shortly after forming the TCU the RF had illegally introduced a new constitution preventing any black Rhodesian from ever casting a vote for or against the government (a limited number could vote for meaningless 'side seats' in Parliament from which the government would never be drawn). This effectively disenfranchised even black serving soldiers and policemen and made escalating war and our defeat inevitable. This worsening situation, combined with the RF's illegal and unconstitutional takeover of the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation (RBC) and Rhodesian Television (RTV) as well as their introduction of D notices (secret censorship used previously by Churchill during the Second World War), meant that even white Rhodesians were now denied any semblance of democratic elections even if they wanted to change the government.

From my years of specialising in guerilla warfare I was all too aware that guerilla war is but an extension of politics. Witnessing the change in our army as we launched into such stupidities as assassinations, the use of minefields, concentration camps and other measures that could only alienate the bulk of our people, I resolved to try to influence the government in the only way left to any Rhodesians of different thinking. Accordingly, I penetrated the RF Party and within a month was a Member of Parliament through a by-election. I had hoped I could work constructively from within but this hope was soon shattered as I served on a number of caucus committees, including defense, and learned just how racist the government was and to what levels it would go to suppress all intelligent discussion even in caucus, secret as those meetings were.

With the TCU being all Territorials, I encouraged political discussion and frequently talked about the principles of guerrilla warfare in a manner I had not been free to do with the regulars. In particular at their level I stressed the importance of working with the people and not indulging in any arrogance or brutality. To handle any prisoner or villager roughly was totally forbidden in the TCU and would result in immediately being RTU'd.

My insistence on respectful and friendly behaviour led to some amusing incidents. At one camp we had captured, an SAS troopie requested my permission to set a booby trap, as we were about to pull out. I asked if he could guarantee me it would not kill or maim a woman or child and he could not. So I then asked for a signal pad and left a note to the enemy commander stuck to a reed door with a bayonet. I congratulated him on the cleanliness of his camp and thanked him for his hospitality in his absence. Some months later in Salisbury I was summoned by my cook as there was a man with a present for me. It was a pumpkin with a note 'From the boys in the bush' thanking me. I asked the messenger how he had found me and he said they had got my address from the phonebook at a store they raided.

At the end of training the second batch of recruits to the TCU we had a visit from Minister of Defence Jack Howman and General Keith Coster. By that stage I had sufficient confidence in all of the trackers to be able to offer General Coster \$100 if he could shake off any tracker. Having just accompanied a team, he declined to take on the challenge. Later we held our first and only quiet and private passing-out parade when new trackers were given their Tracker Combat Flashes – the only distinguishing badge we ever had and one the men were proud to have earned.

Earlier I mentioned talking politics and deeper issues of guerrilla warfare more freely in the TCU. Later several of its members were to join me in the Rhodesia Party as we tried to bring the war to an end. I was also joined by some of the original police from GATU days. Police Special Branch very cautiously began providing me with information from a high level. I long suspected that some of this was coming from Ken Flower himself who was anti-RF and had barely survived the purge of Putterill and Hawkins. His posthumously published memoirs seem to confirm that he was the source of some of my information. Clearly there were men who did understand at a deeper level just how rapidly and foolishly the RF and conventional military thinking were losing the war.

By the early 1970s I was convinced we were bringing about our own defeat in part because of the very success and proficiency of our small army. Our success led to arrogance and thus unwillingness on the part of government to see the other man's point of view, so necessary to bringing any guerrilla war to an end without destroying the economy, army, police and other vital elements of a stable nation. On one occasion Smith had singled me out in caucus for praise because of the successes of the TCU – very unusual and the only time any unit was ever mentioned in these secret meetings. This concerned me deeply and led to me start to seek an issue on which I could part company with him and the RF where I had been playing a false role with great difficulty.

Surprising most of my RF fellow-MPs, I chose one day in caucus to announce to the Prime Minister that I would be crossing the floor, as I had no confidence in him. I then, together with others, reformed the Rhodesia Party, which had previously been led by Sir Roy Welensky and had been effectively destroyed as a white opposition party. In my civilian role as a Member of Parliament I was appealing publicly for us to use the term guerrilla rather than terrorist. This I did because guerrilla forces need to spread terror and thus undermine the economy and confidence in the government, amongst other objectives, and guerrilla is a less emotional word. The name terrorist when used by any government simply plays into enemy hands by spreading terror, a lesson that Bush and Blair governments have still not learned. Following the events of 11 September, the announcement by President Bush of his 'war against terrorism' rather than announcing that America would bring the perpetrators to justice and lead a 'war against poverty and injustice' is an example a low level of political and military understanding of such wars.

I was also appealing to the RF, which had taken illegal control of the RBC and RTV, to report military successes which are always immediately known to the enemy but not to our civilian population; and not to report acts of terror which are also always known to the enemy but not to the population at large. Maintaining secrecy about our military successes while broadcasting acts of terror by 'terrorists', as Smith and General Walls were by this time doing, meant our government-controlled media were being used more to keep the RF in power than do what was right for our nation. For this reason I began to say in speeches that Smith and Walls were winning the war for Mugabe. Unfortunately, through my failure to get an understanding of guerrilla warfare into our army, we were now paying the full price and RF broadcasting continued to undermine us till the war's end with full compliance by our generals.

To my mind we were daily accelerating our defeat as our military successes grew. Where our successes should have bought time for political compromise to end the war with dignity for both sides, they were instead resulting in increased RF boasting, arrogance and intransigence. Perhaps more than any other factor the misuse of national media was accelerating the end and reducing our chances of maintaining any form of stable government structure or of keeping the security forces intact. The great lesson for me was that all would have been very different if, at the time of UDI, all officers had stood firm to the oaths we made when commissioned. Our greatest single mistake was senior officers transferring allegiance from the nation to a political party.

We had now reached a point in the war where I realised the best thing I could do for my country and my comrades-in-arms (the army was almost my life) was to try to preserve the army intact after our defeat. Not only that but I could foresee the slaughter of our minority tribe, the Ndebele, following our collapse, as we now had three party political armies in the field. I knew this would be a lone battle with even friends not understanding my actions but it was necessary. The British whom I warned were cynical and said that at least further bloodshed would not be on their hands. The Americans whom I also warned were naïve and said they were sure I was wrong and no more killing would take place if we ended the war.

By this time I had crossed the floor in Parliament and re-formed the defunct Rhodesia Party. Because I intended to publicly criticise the generals as well as Ian Smith's handling of the war, I decided the honourable thing was to ask General Walls to relieve me of my command. It would have been awkward for him to have me at unit commander's conferences and other meetings while publicly being critical of his handling of the war.

Immediately and understandably I was excluded from all further planning and discussions. I was merely informed that the decision had been made to disband the TCU in favour of forming a new mixed-race unit to be named the Selous Scouts under the command of a regular officer, Ron Reid Daly. A slight hitch occurred when my officers and men indicated they would leave rather than serve under a regular officer. I held my one and only meeting with Ron to talk about his plans and to offer my support. I undertook to try to persuade the officers and men of the TCU to accept that the unit would be absorbed in the newly forming Selous Scouts. My success was limited in that while some officers and men joined the Scouts others simply left.

From here on I became persona non grata within the army. I was awarded an MFC (Non Operational), the lowest decoration in the Rhodesian Army, which I declined to accept and my last night in the SAS mess we drank a toast to My F...ing Contribution (MFC) in recognition of this insult.

For me it had been twenty long years from the first shots I saw fired in anger in Nyasaland. How long it had been was brought home to me by a young SAS troopie who sat all day with me ambushing a path in Mozambique. At one point I whispered to him asking him if he remembered an earlier incident. He shocked me by whispering back, 'Don't be stupid, Sir. I wasn't even born!'