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**BRISTOL**

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"The Battle of Chesa Keep is a response, written for our regimental magazine in Johannesburg circa 1995, to an account by a former member of Support Unit, of an incident when an Internal Affairs member had panicked under attack and had shot out the main Mount Darwin to Rushinga power line. We found it all very amusing at the time. 'Mantle' was the Support Unit radio identifier."

Dear Steve,

I read, with a combination of fascination and delight, Ian Duncan's account of the above.

I remember the incident quite clearly, largely because it all took place during my first PATU stint. I was at Oscar Base as the junior member of the redoubtable Marandellas Regular One, led by Dave Young, then an Inspector, Dick Smart, Tony Connelly and Cst. "Mach" Machikoto. If I remember correctly it was round about March 1976. My date/time group might be a bit awry, but the following is largely how I remember things:

The gook detachment in question was led by one Rex Gumbo who, if I remember Brian Marriott's briefing correctly had already earned himself quite a reputation.

We of Marandellas Regular One were going into our own ambush position a few hundred metres to the East (left) of the "Mantle" callsign at the time of the first incident and our first indication that something was afoot was when we were lightly showered with leaves and twigs from the canopy above us. Then the familiar "Crack-Thump". Up until that day I had had a bit of a thing about my height (the bare minimum for the BSAP plus a very precious inch). This was my first experience of shots fired in anger and, wet behind the ears as I was, I decided we must be the real targets. I reckon I hit the ground a full second before anybody else. It was a minor detail that the bullets in question were some forty feet in the air and not getting any closer.

In a position of extreme intimacy with a tree stump I made a deal with my Creator, which entailed being very, very good for the rest of my life and lo and behold, the shooting stopped, apart from a couple of sporadic bursts in the distance. God (as I understand Him) is a good outjie and I think he'll forgive me my subsequent venial albeit frequent renegeing upon our deal.

In the subsequent reshuffle, our intrepid stick was deployed to a hilltop to act as radio relay. Shortly after midnight, before my watch I was awakened by a highly agitated Cst. Machikoto: "Seh, Seh, there is a wild beast in the camp". He was right. My reluctant return to consciousness was greeted by the sound of rustling and a low coughing. We were just a few K's from Umfurudzi Wildlife Area and my immediate thought was hyena. We all know the stories.

I decided that, rather than startle the others, I'd find the animal and if I couldn't chase it away I'd shoot it; after all the gooks already knew that there were wall-to-wall SF in the area (In contrast to the status

quo in Chesa in the latter days of the war). That was the gist of my otherwise inchoate plan anyway. I briefed Machikoto and proceeded in high combat morale, as the saying goes.

About forty seconds into the execution of my task I heard Dick Smart's voice: "Jones, what are you doing?" It somehow shatters a nineteen year old's bravura to be observed, silhouetted in the moonlight, FN at the ready, stalking a porcupine! Fortunately for me, this incident was soon forgotten, paling into insignificance in comparison with the IntAff lad's novel way of imposing a blackout on Rushinga. A remarkable feat in fact, because if I remember rightly, Ian Duncan might be able to verify this, the severed line in question was directly (and I mean directly) above the keep.

Predictably we were deployed to the scene of the battle. I'm not terribly sure why. Dave Young identified me as exemplary PATU material when I found a RM parked so as to provide shade and crawled under it to resume my disturbed slumber of the previous night. Goaded into action, I joined the rest of my stick doing Guard Force PT on the stoep of one of the stores in Chesa Township. Notwithstanding the trauma of the previous night the store owner, obviously a man of character and a capitalist to boot (so much for the socialist revolution) was open for business to the dozens of warriors who had descended upon his little Urb.

I was dispatched to buy cokes and discovered to my horror that the blighter was selling warm cokes for six cents and cold ones for eight. I reported this to my esteemed Inspector and said "I'm sure that that's an offence in terms of the Emergency Powers Price Control Regulation" (I must have just written my P/Os' annuals) to which the legal pundit replied "who cares" and drank his Coke - one of my most salutary lessons in the exercise of discretion.

Rex Gumbo, I believe, subsequently met his creator courtesy of the RAR in very much the same area, so that put a stop to his nonsense.

Finally; and I can't remember the exact sequence of events here, but it probably resulted from the destruction of the spoor Ian talks about, we were deployed into the farming area to search and question. I remember going into a homestead and the stick breaking up to search it. We were still fairly punctilious in those days and each went with a member of the family to search our respective buildings. I searched a rondavel which obviously served as a workshop-cum-toolshed and my "witness" was a young girl of perhaps fifteen or sixteen. My search was a little cursory until I glanced up at where she was standing next to the doorway. I saw that she was sweating and shaking like a leaf. Obviously this made me suspicious and I left not a stone, implement or anything else unturned. I found nothing. Using Mach' as a translator I questioned her about what she was so afraid of and predictably didn't get an answer I could make anything of.

Only later did it dawn upon me that what she had been afraid of was an unshaven figure, with a gun, in a camouflage uniform who, as far as she knew, could do anything with her he wanted. I learned two lessons from that small experience: that image and self-image can often be worlds apart (who on Earth would be afraid of harmless little me?); and that whatever their sympathies, in the final analysis the people on the land were pretty much defenceless pawns in a war over ideologies that meant nothing to them and whose ultimate reality was that they were vulnerable to a degree beyond our understanding.

Blimey, that last bit was philosophical, what?

If you decide to stick any of this in the "Outpost", you can obviously edit it as you see fit. If you decide not to stick any of it in the Outpost, it has at least allowed me an hour of interesting (to me anyway) reminiscence.

Oh, and congratulations on a superb "Outpost".

Yours Aye,

Geraint "Bomber" Jones