

Praise for Counter-Strike from the Sky

“*Counter-Strike* is more than a blow-by-blow account of Operation *Dingo* ... it provides the reader with a thorough understanding of how the Fireforce concept worked, with technical details for the keen militarist”

John Redfern, Msasa Mail

“The counter-insurgency skills refined by the Rhodesians have transformed the way that Western militaries fight guerrillas; I can speak from personal experience that those tactics have saved many lives in Afghanistan, including my own”

MacKenzie, California, USA

“It is an excellent survey of counter-insurgency operations in Rhodesia ... with the current interest in counter-insurgency operations it will provide useful reading”

Alan Jeffreys, Military History Association Journal

“*Counter-Strike from the Sky* will become one of those specialist military classics, such as von Mellenthin’s *Panzer Battles 1939-1945*, Lord Moran’s *The Anatomy of Courage* and Michael Herr’s *Dispatches*”

Dominic Hoole, The Star

“It is fantastic and I will certainly add it to my growing collection of great books about the heroic effort that Rhodesia put forth in maintaining its independence against all odds and the world”

Frank Resillez, Political Analyst, USA

“I consider it to be a milestone in books about Rhodesia and it has brought to light many issues I had never known or considered”

George Hall, UK

“This book should be found on professional reading lists and as command and staff course texts. Wood’s prose, graphics, illustrations, and Cocks’s audio-visual presentation successfully bring the reader and viewer into the intense world of Fireforce operations. This is a fully documented work written and edited from the insights of participants. I highly recommend it as the lessons of the past have a relevance to the needs of the present”

Charles D. Melson, Chief Historian, History Division, U.S. Marine Corps

“It is a must-read for any soldier anywhere in the world to learn the skills created by the masters of airborne COIN ops. The book has so much detail it’s like a manual but it’s also a must-read book for anyone interested in military history”

YouTube comment

Counter-Strike from the Sky

The Rhodesian All-Arms Fireforce in the
War in the Bush 1974 — 1980

J. R. T. Wood



Also by J. R. T. Wood:

The Public Career of John, Second Earl of Stair, to 1720

The Welensky Papers: A History of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, 1953–1963
(1983)

The War Diaries of André Dennison (1989)

So Far and No Further! Rhodesia's bid for independence during the retreat from Empire 1959-1965 (2005)

A Matter of Weeks Rather than Months: Sanctions and Abortive Settlements: 1965–1969
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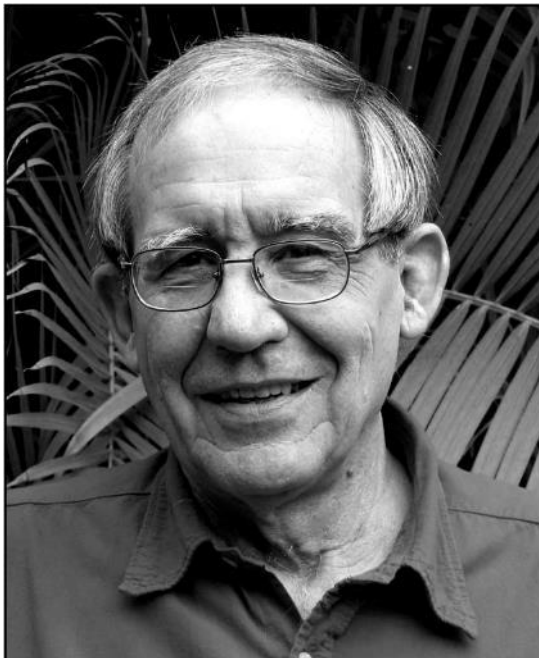
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*For Carole and Andy,
my unflinching support team*

Dr Richard Wood, BA (Hons) (Rhodes), PhD (Edinburgh), FRHistS, was born in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia). He was educated at St George's College in Harare (then Salisbury), Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, and Edinburgh University, Scotland. He was a Commonwealth scholar and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. He was the Ernest Oppenheimer Memorial Research Fellow at the University of Rhodesia and a Professor of History at the University of Durban-Westville, South Africa. He is undoubtedly the foremost historian and researcher on the history of Rhodesia in the decades following World War II and, with exclusive access to the hitherto closed papers of Ian Smith, has written three definitive publications and is currently working on the final volume in the series that will cover the period 1970–1980. He is a renowned military historian, having served as a territorial soldier in the 1st and 8th Battalions, the Rhodesia Regiment, and in the Mapping and Research Unit of the Rhodesian Intelligence Corps. He has also published numerous articles, conference papers and chapters in books, including in a chapter in the recently published Daniel Marston and Cart Malkasian, *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare* (Osprey Publishing, Oxford, 2008). Richard has a lifelong interest in matters military, rugby and fly-fishing. He lives in Durban, South Africa with his wife Carole.



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Acknowledgments

The original script of this account was written in the early 1990s and eventually found its way onto my website, www.jrtwood.com, together with my drawings. Several people suggested that I publish it as a book. Among them were my son, Andrew, and Jeremy Hall, once Lance-Corporal Hall, J., 6 Troop, 2 Commando, 1RLI. Then earlier this year, without any prompting, my publisher, Chris Cocks (also a onetime lance-corporal), offered to publish a history of Fireforce, an offer I could not refuse.

Fireforce is an example among many of Rhodesian ingenuity. There was no textbook on which to base strategy and tactics; the Rhodesians wrote that as they went along. The young men who manned the Fireforces are examples of raw courage. Few soldiers have been asked to face jumps into the unknown every day of a deployment. My only direct experience of Fireforce was when, as an 8RR lance-corporal manning an OP, I talked a K-Car onto a line of running men. After 1976 in the company of Dr Graham Child, David Lee, Donovan Slatter, Bill Lacey and 'Winkie' Prentice, all of the Research Section of the Rhodesian Intelligence Corps, I studied Fireforce contacts reports and produced research reports on our findings.

The long time span of the genesis of this book means that it is difficult to recall every assistance given. My family, Carole and Andrew, have had to live with the constant rebuke "I have a book to write". Major Chuck Melson, the Chief Historian of the US Marine Corps has been a valued friend, collaborator and a constant source of research material. Brigadier David Heppenstall, Colonel John Redfern and lieutenant-colonels Garth Barrett and Ron Reid-Daly allowed me sight of the research material on which this book is based. Alex Binda generously passed on photocopies of contact reports. Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer and Wing Commander Harold Griffiths allowed me sight of their logbooks. Squadron Leader 'Prop' Geldenhuys has not only answered numerous questions, supplied copies of his books but went to the trouble to obtain Mozambican maps for me. Paul Naish and Craig Fourie are always ready to help and have supplied me with research material, the latter also kindly making available a plethora of photographs.

Jonathan Harvey, Dennis Croukamp, Fraser Brown, Theo Nel, Jerry Strong, Johan Joubert, Max T, Jon Caffin, Peter Petter-Bowyer, Tom Argyle, Jimmy Swan, Nigel Henson, the late Pete McDonald and Beryl Salt, Claude Botha, Harry Whitehead, Ross Parker, Jeremy Hall, Tony Coom and Dave Heppenstall of the RAR Regimental Association (UK) were also

generous with their photos. Craig Bone kindly supplied the cover painting and two of the colour plates.

Among the people with whom I discussed this subject either directly or on the telephone or by email were: the late Air Marshal Norman Walsh, Lieutenant-Generals the late Peter Walls and John Hickman, Major-General Leon Jacobs, Brigadiers Tom Davidson, Peter Hosking, David Heppenstall and the late John McVey, Colonels the late Mike Pelham and John Redfern, Lieutenant-Colonels Charlie Aust, Mick McKenna, the late Ron Reid-Daly, Brian Robinson and Grahame Wilson, Commandant Neal Ellis, Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, Wing Commander Harold Griffiths, Majors John Cronin, Peter Hean, Nigel Henson and David Padbury, Captains Mike Webb and Mark Adams and Lieutenants Neill Jackson, Mike Rich, Vernon Prinsloo, Graeme Murdoch, Squadron Leaders Prop Geldenhuys, Victor Wightman and Alf Wild, Captain Jacques Dubois, Flight Lieutenants Michael Borlace, Michael Ronne and the late Victor Cook, Sergeant-Major John Norman, Sergeant Ron Flint, Beaver Shaw, Corporal Peter Leid Lance Corporal Jeremy Hall, Mike McDonald, Dr Cliff Webster, and my cousin, the late David Arnold. I thank them all and pray for forgiveness from anyone else whom I have forgotten.

Richard Wood
Durban, South Africa
November 2010

Glossary

ANFO	ammonium nitrate and fuel oil explosive mixture
BSAP	British South Africa Police
CIO	Central Intelligence Organization
ComOps	Combined Operations Headquarters
CT	Communist terrorist
FAF	forward airfield
FN	<i>Fabrique Nationale</i> , Belgian arms manufacturer
FPLM	<i>Forças Populares para o Libertação de Moçambique</i>
Frantan	frangible tank napalm bomb
FRELIMO	<i>Frente de Libertação de Moçambique</i>
G-Car	Alouette III helicopter troop-carrier
Golf bomb	460kg Rhodesian-made pressure bomb
<i>gomo</i>	hill (Shona)
JOC	Joint Operational Centre
K-Car	Alouette III helicopter gunship
MAG	<i>Mitrailleuse d'Appui General</i> , 7.62 x 51mm general-purpose machine gun
MID	Military Intelligence Directorate
Mini-Golf	small version of the Golf bomb
NCO	non-commissioned officer
PATU	Police Anti-Terrorist Unit
QNH	above mean sea level, nautical height
ter/terr	terrorist (slang)
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAR	Rhodesian African Rifles
RhAF	Rhodesian Air Force
RIC	Rhodesian Intelligence Corps
RLI	Rhodesian Light Infantry
RR	Rhodesia Regiment
RRAF	Royal Rhodesian Air Force
RRR	Royal Rhodesia Regiment
SAS	Special Air Service
SB	Special Branch
TTL	Tribal Trust Land
UANC	United African National Council
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union

ZIPRA

Zimbabwe People's Liberation Army

Foreword

by Charles D. Melson, USMC

Almost a half-century after these 1965-to-1980 events took place, there is still an active interest in the details of the Rhodesian War, the last of the British Empire and Commonwealth's independence struggles in Africa. Recently, this has even seen the reprint of previous accounts but without substantial update.¹ Yet original records and study exist and this narrative is a first-rate example of what the last decades of research work have accomplished.

I feel privileged to be asked to write this foreword as I have neither the academic qualifications of its author, Richard Wood, nor the combat experience of its editor, Chris Cocks. Wood had produced one of the classic company commander's accounts of the Rhodesian War, *The War Diaries of André Dennison*,² while Cocks wrote the defining personal memoir of frontline fighting in *Fireforce: One Man's War in the Rhodesian Light Infantry*.³ Both authors have also been active in continued work and publication of material on the conflict that continues with this current project. I am glad to see my own research has been of use in this effort.⁴

My interest in the conflict in Rhodesia began in 1971 while in Southeast Asia. As a junior leader I was pondering how to do a better job in my small patch of the Vietnam War. Direct exposure to British experience in Malaya and reading about Rhodesia's 'thin white line' seemed to offer other solutions to tactics, techniques and procedures. A number of Americans, including U.S. Marines, served in the Rhodesian security forces during the war, bringing back first-hand experience and recollections. The U.S. Marine Corps maintained a low level of continued curiosity in pseudo techniques, mine- and ambushed-proofed vehicles, and the conduct of operations through the 1980s and 1990s. The Global War on Terrorism witnessed a

¹ Paul Moorcraft and Peter McLaughlin republished their 1982 book *Chimurenga: The War in Rhodesia, 1965–1980* without change or revision.

² Ashanti Publishing, 1989.

³ 30° South Publishers, 2006, first published in 1988 by Galago.

⁴ See Charles D. Melson, 'Top Secret War: Rhodesian Special Operations', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, March 2005, pp. 57–82; and a manuscript draft on Fireforce, 'The Killing Machine', a chapter from a larger unpublished work examining the Rhodesian War.