

THE SEARCH FOR

PUMA 164

OPERATION URIC AND THE ASSAULT ON MAPAI

Neill Jackson & Rick van Malsen



*... the words that were torn from that time
Taken for poems, by a young man
Lost, afraid; caught up
In the dust and the noise of an African war*
—Chas Lotter

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Old Bill of the Order 2009–2010 Memorable Order of Tin Hats, South Africa

THE ORIGIN OF THE CRASH-SITE SEARCHES: A TRIBUTE TO BOB MANSER AND
'KUTANGA MAC'

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY



SOUTHERN AFRICA

AUTHOR'S NOTE

We dedicate this book to all the women who were left behind while their men went to war—to the mothers, the sisters, the wives and the girlfriends. One can only try to imagine what they went through on a daily basis while their men were facing unknown perils, and yet they had to continue with their lives as if nothing were amiss, especially when their menfolk returned home, and normality was the most important thing they required. Especially to those women who made the ultimate sacrifice, and gave up their men for the cause. Some of the responses that we have received to our Puma search report give an indication of what these brave women had to endure:

- A widowed mother whose adult son still lived with her; after his death in the Puma crash, she literally pined to death over a period of two years.
- The girlfriend of the same man who, 30 years later, has never married.
- The mother of one of the South African airmen, who until now had only been told that her son had died in an aircraft crash 'somewhere in the operational area'.
- The wife of one of the engineers, who gave birth to her dead husband's son five months after the crash.
- The ex-wife of another engineer, who was divorced from him shortly before Operation Uric after having been childhood sweethearts.
- The two brave women who ventured into Mozambique on the 30th anniversary of the Puma crash to pay their respects to their lost brothers and to the men who died with them.
- The mother who lost her husband in a contact in the war, before her eldest son hit a landmine during his national service and was paralyzed, dying of his injuries two years later. She then submitted to her 17-year-old son's demands, signing the indemnity form allowing him to go on active service with the RLI. Uric was his first operation. He was on board Puma 164.
- The newly engaged woman who received her fiancé's ring, taken from his charred body by one of his best mates, and delivered to her after Operation Uric.
- The girlfriend of an RLI soldier, left with a fatherless daughter.
- The mother with two sons in the same unit and on the same operation; only one came home.
- The pacifist mother whose last image of her son was newsreel footage of him standing next to a recently destroyed bridge, camouflage cream streaked across his face, machine gun at the ready, ammunition belts slung across his chest. By the time she saw the footage, he was already dead.
- The older sister who, after listening quietly to the facts surrounding the crash, asked in a small, vulnerable voice, 'Does this mean he is definitely never coming home?'
- The 21-year-old mother, left with a four-month-old baby, who waited almost 30 years for some sign that she should carry on with her life, and who then re-married on the very day that the search team located the grave of her late husband.
- The proud mother, attending the passing out parade for her 18-year-old son as he was accepted into the RLI. One month later he was dead.

- The sister of one of the engineers, who watched the helicopters fly over her home town en route to Mozambique, and had a terrible premonition that her brother would not be coming back. He did not return and, five years after his death, she lost her husband to a heart attack on the sports field. Then, three years later, her 16-year-old daughter had a fit and drowned in the bath. Six years later, her mother died, followed shortly by her father.
- The young woman whose boyfriend was tragically killed in action while serving with the SAS, and who then met and fell in love with an RLI soldier. This soldier was destined to die on board Puma 164.

—Neill Jackson

Villiersdorp, Western Cape

February 2011

DEDICATION

To all the women who fought the loneliness war at home

One day in the late 1970s, I was on a Dakota bound for a landing strip at Kanyemba. From there, we were to deploy into Mozambique. One of my fellow troopies said that his wife had a question for me. She had asked him why this Lotter character, who wrote so much about the Rhodesian troopie, had never written one word about the women left at home and about the wartime issues which they had to deal with daily. I thought about her words during that entire deployment and when it was over, when we came home again, I wrote ‘Loneliness War’, which reads, in part:

*... even if
He has not been hit
She still must answer the children's fears
Calm their nighttime screams
While fighting to control her own*

Ever since I heard about the fork found at the Puma 164 crash site in Mozambique, I have been haunted by its implications. There, slowly rusting away in the Mozambican bush, was something from the pack of a troopie who went down in flames that day: a fork missed by a mother or a wife, who fully intended when he came home again, to rip the ears off her man for looting her dinnerware; a mother or a wife who never had that opportunity—because he never came back. A mother or a wife, somewhere, who would have given her entire dinner service and much, much more just to have had the opportunity to be able to see him again rather than having to live with the knowledge that he was missing in action and probably dead in a foreign country.

This is the kind of issue that our womenfolk have to deal with. They do so, in their own way and in their own time, but they do deal with it and do so with a strength that we can never match. I salute them.

—Chas Lotter
Irene, Pretoria
February 2011

About Chas Lotter

Chas was born in Germiston, South Africa, in 1949. His family moved to Rhodesia in 1953, and it was there that he grew up on farms in the Bindura and Gatooma areas. He moved to Salisbury in 1974, where he met his wife, Avril. They now live in Pretoria with their two children, Melissa and Carl. The early years of their marriage were typical of Rhodesians of their generation. Family life and daily routine were

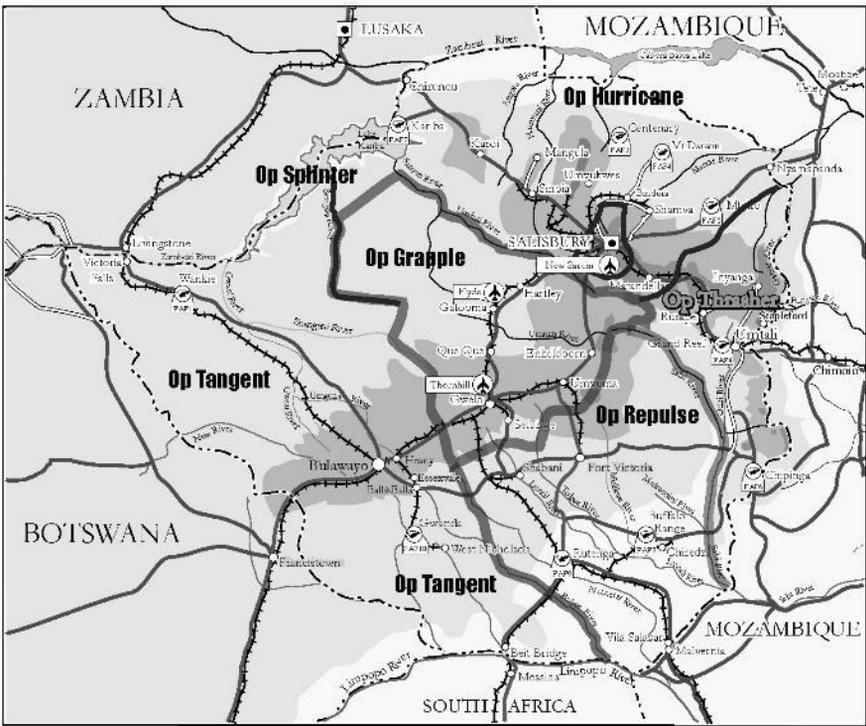
overtaken by the increasing demands of army commitments as the war gathered in intensity.

As a field medic, Sergeant Chas Lotter served for nine years with front-line units of the Rhodesian Army. It was these nine years of action, emotion and savage experience that fuelled the poet's fire in him. He started writing poetry 'on the backs of cigarette boxes' in an attempt to deal with the realities of the war that surrounded him. From such humble beginnings emerged a series of vivid pictures of an African nation at war.

His work was first published in Peter Badcock's volume *Shadows of War*. He then collaborated with Badcock on another successful work, *Faces of War*, which blended Badcock's pencil sketches with Lotter's poetry. In 1984 he published his highly acclaimed volume, *Rhodesian Soldier*. This remarkable book—now a scarce and much sought-after collector's item—blends photographs and verse to form a wide-ranging monograph of the bush war. He then dedicated an entire year to scouring the world, through personal contacts and through the Internet, for the right photographs to match his poetry. The resulting publication, *Echoes of an African War*, was released in 1999; it is an effective and honest attempt to capture the spirit of the Rhodesian war era. He has won international recognition for his work, far beyond the borders of his home country, earning him membership of the English Academy of Southern Africa



Chas Lotter



-  = Rhodesian Operational Areas
-  = Forward Airfield
-  = Rhodesian Air Force Base

Rhodesian Security Forces,
Operational Boundaries



J.P. Wood

FOREWORD

*By the late Lieutenant-General G.P. Walls GLM, DCD, MBE
Commander Combined Operations
Former Commanding Officer 1st Battalion Rhodesian Light Infantry
Former Officer Commanding C Squadron Special Air Service*



Lieutenant-General Peter Walls. Source: Mary Armstrong

Just as nature provides for constant conflict between predators and their prey, it is a natural phenomenon that there will always be armed struggles among humans in the form of war, riots, insurrection and manifestations of human greed. In nearly all cases there are casualties of some kind or other. It is the accepted lot of servicemen that they may suffer death, permanent or temporary disability and often the trauma and scars of severe mental, psychological and spiritual injury. Sadly, their relatives, especially the next of kin, and a host of close friends, suffer as casualties too. Operation Uric, as it was called, was mounted in our southeast operational area and into Mozambique. It formed part of our military effort in 1979 against the terrorist onslaught by ZANU-PF and, by that time, active Frelimo forces. Both were deployed within our country with increasingly aggressive support from Samora Machel of Mozambique, who had until then stopped short of applying outright pressure on the Patriotic Front to get it to negotiate an end to their military struggle. The outcome of Operation Uric, together with other factors, was that Machel told the Patriotic Front it had no option but to agree to a peace conference proposed by Britain with the support of the United Nations.