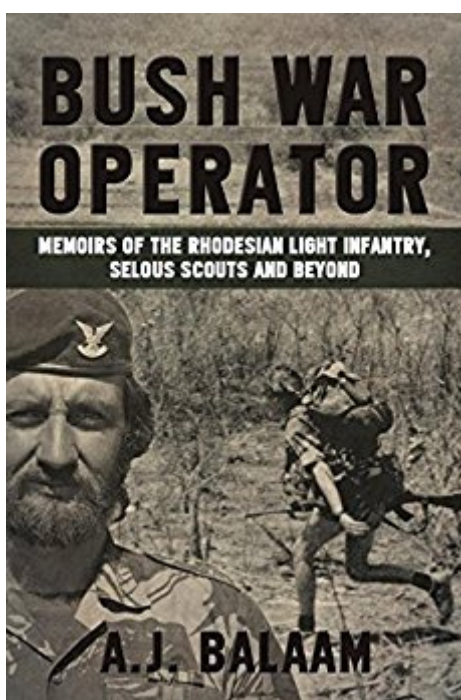


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Bush War Operator: Memoirs Of The Rhodesian Light Infantry, Selous Scouts And Beyond



Synopsis

From the searing heat of the Zambezi Valley to the freezing cold of the Chimanimani Mountains in Rhodesia, from the bars in Port St Johns in the Transkei to the Drakensberg Mountains in South Africa, this is the story of one man's fight against terror, and his conscience. Anyone living in Rhodesia during the 1960s and 1970s would have had a father, husband, brother or son called up in the defense of the war-torn, landlocked little country. A few of these brave men would have been members of the elite and secretive unit that struck terror into the hearts of the ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas infiltrating the country at that time - the Selous Scouts. These men were highly trained and disciplined, with skills to rival the SAS, Navy Seals and the US Marines, although their dress and appearance were wildly unconventional: civilian clothing with blackened, hairy faces to resemble the very people they were fighting against. Twice decorated - with the Member of the Legion of Merit (MLM) and the Military Forces' Commendation (MFC) - Andrew Balaam was a member of the Rhodesian Light Infantry and later the Selous Scouts, for a period spanning twelve years. This is his honest and insightful account of his time as a pseudo operator. His story is brutally truthful, frightening, sometimes humorous and often sad. In later years, after Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, he was involved with a number of other former Selous Scouts in the attempted coups in the Ciskei, a South African homeland, and Lesotho, an independent nation, whose only crimes were supporting the African National Congress. Training terrorists, or as they preferred to be called, 'liberation armies', to conduct a war of terror on innocent civilians, was the very thing he had spent the last ten years in Rhodesia fighting against. This is the true, untold story of these failed attempts at governmental overthrows.

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Customer Reviews

A good read and reasonably well written. A completely personal account, Balaam retrospectively recounts events as he saw and lived them. Of great interest was his take on the international politics of the time (stinky and suspect, as always). Also a good insight on what became of many Scouts after Rhodesia was 'liberated' (strange word to use, considering the objectives and outcomes of the 'liberation'). I rated 5 stars for this book, mainly as it is one man's self-honest angle on a sad period in the history of Zimbabwe - and we know where that poor country has ended up today. The Rhodesian bush war remains an oft forgotten chapter in the history of southern Africa and this is a good starting book for those who want to learn more.

I found it to be a very interesting book about his experiences, and well worth the read. I would have preferred more on Rhodesia as this was more of interest to me. He went through some horrific scenes and you wonder how he has managed to remain balanced and sane. Top stuff.

Somewhat disconnected at times, as Balaam jumps from scene to scene, but a very realistic look at both combat and the Rhodesian War. I have met several former RLI members, and once had dinner with a former RLI and SAS member who was in 1985 the highest ranking White in the Zimbabwean Army, but Andrew Balaam's account definitely gives far more insight than can be gleaned from casual conversations. Lionel Dyke had explained to me that the Rhodesian War was not a matter of race, and that Whites and Africans had got on quite well prior to War. Balaam simply recounts what it was like growing up in a town on the Zambezi river with African friends and a personal familiarity with Crocs, Hippos, and other African wildlife. And what it was like serving with Africans in an African War. First with the Rhodesian Light Infantry working at times with the Rhodesian African Rifles. Later, as a trooper in the Selous Scouts, he undergoes training with the South African Special Forces. On one of their days off, the Rhodesians, a handful of Whites and several handfuls of Africans, went to a nearby public beach. Once White South Africans begin arriving, there were

complaints about Blacks on the beach. The authorities explained that the Whites were welcome, but the non-Whites must leave. To a man, all the Rhodesians stormed off. If it was not good enough for Black Rhodesians, then it was not good enough for White Rhodesians either. So, Rhodesia was a very different country than South Africa under Apartheid despite their similarities. The book is relatively free of political judgments, but some have to be made. Given Zimbabwe's history under Robert Mugabe, American sympathy for the underdog was misplaced when we decided that Mugabe and his ilk were freedom fighters. Balaam doesn't make any grandstanding speeches, he just states what he personally experienced in accordance with how he and his mates saw it at the time, and lets the reader draw their own conclusions.

Disappointing. Extremely disjointed in terms of timeframes and where it all fit in the "Bush Wars" that form the big picture! Some of the detailed descriptions of the operations he was on are very interesting in terms of the tactics employed by both sides. All in all, I would not recommend.

This is a very deep look into a mind haunted by the past. The book is extremely interesting, and at the same time more than a little depressing. The author does not gloss over what he did. He describes it. The only complaint would be the editing, this would be a 5 star book if it had a better editor.

Odd writing style.

As with "3 Sips of Gin", this book gives a rare insight into the bush wars in Rhodesia and surrounding countries in the 70s and 80s.

I am sure this is what war feels like. I enjoyed the honesty and emotion, from a real soldier who was there. I recommend the book to any one who has any interest in the Rhodesian bush war. I can't wait for more from the author.

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