

TRACKING,
ANTI - TRACKING AND
COUNTER - TRACKING DURING
COLONIALISM

A SHORT ESSAY BY

Dr. Timothy J. Stapleton and Dr. Kyt Lyn Walken, December 2020



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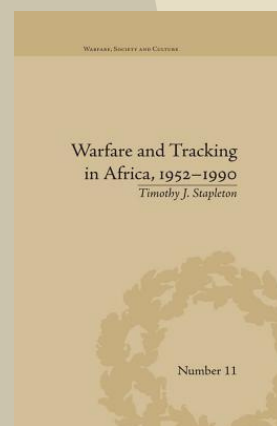
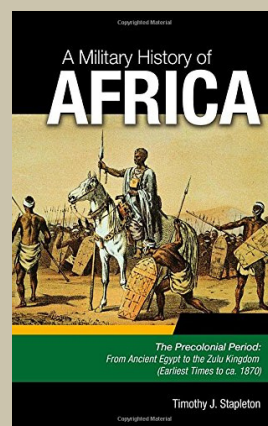
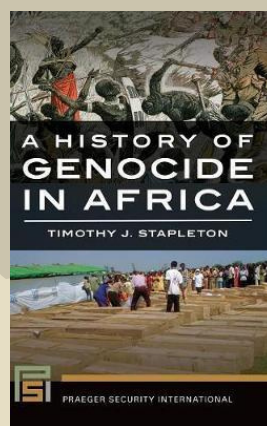
COLONIALISM



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Africa: War and Conflict in the Twentieth Century, London: Routledge, 2018.

A History of Genocide in Africa, Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2017.

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(revised edition of 1994 Maqoma: Xhosa Resistance to Colonial Advance).

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No Insignificant Part: The Rhodesia Native Regiment and the East African Campaign of the First World War, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006.

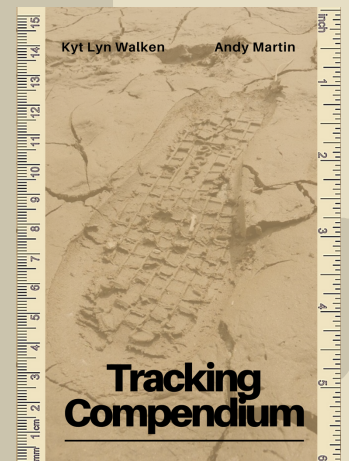
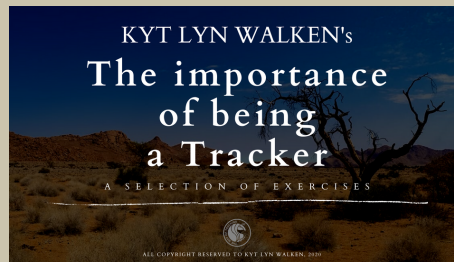
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Maqoma: Xhosa Resistance to Colonial Advance, c.1798-1873, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1994.

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Kyt Lyn Walken is the First Female Mantracking Lead Instructor in Europe.

An authentic Trader of this Ancient Art, that is still so effective nowadays from Search and Rescue, Tactical dimension, Forensic Science until Wildlife Conservation.

She has been entitled "Official Representative of Hull's Tracking School" in 2018.

Mike Hull is her Mentor and she has become a Conservation Ranger after attending a two weeks course in Poland led by C.R.O.W. (Conservation Rangers Operations Worldwide).

Kyt Lyn has also studied "Forensic Photographs on Crime Scene", held by UK Forensic Advisor and former S.A.S. Robert Kendall.

Currently she runs Man and Animal Tracking courses all over Europe, and she is regular writer for some prestigious US and UK based webzines on Survival, Offgrid Living and Prepping. She has been entitled Directora de la Escuela de Rastreo Humano Carcayú - Spain. She is Guest Instructor for Veteranen Search Team (The Netherlands).

She is author of the Manuals "The importance of being a Tracker", "The Urban Tracker" and "Tracking Compendium" (with Andy Martin).

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

By Prof. Timothy J. Stapleton



A nationalist Rhodesian fighter trains in 1975 in Rhodesia. Source: Getty Images

During the late twentieth century, Southern Africa became the scene of a series of inter-related insurgency and counter-insurgency wars in which tracking and anti-tracking featured prominently.

In general, African nationalist insurgent forces backed by the Eastern Bloc in the Cold War context engaged in guerrilla warfare campaigns against white minority and colonial regimes with conventional militaries including mechanized and air capabilities.

With staging areas in neighbouring and sympathetic countries like Zambia and Tanzania, African nationalist insurgents comprised light infantry forces that remained elusive while they infiltrated their home countries to politicize rural communities and conduct hit-and-run attacks on state and economic infrastructure.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

By Prof. Timothy J. Stapleton



South African troops on patrol 1980's Border War. Source: Reddit

As in other similar conflicts, the main military challenge for Southern Africa's counter-insurgent forces involved locating and eliminating the guerrillas, and differentiating them from the wider civilian population. Since Portugal refused to decolonize, the Portuguese armed forces fought nationalist insurgents in Angola and Mozambique (as well as Guinea-Bissau in West Africa) during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Portugal benefited from membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and devoted the majority of its military resources in Africa to defending oil-producing Angola where it fought three rebel groups.

While these conflicts ended with regime change in Lisbon and Portugal's sudden withdrawal from Africa in 1974-75, Angola and Mozambique continued to experience civil war for several decades. Indeed, the independence of the Portuguese colonies represented a major turning point for the region's armed struggles as the governments of independent Angola and Mozambique strongly supported nationalist movements in the neighbouring white ruled states of Rhodesia, South Africa and South African occupied South West Africa.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

By Prof. Timothy J. Stapleton



Rhodesian Light Infantry. Source: Pinterest

In Rhodesia, where a white minority state broke with imperial power Britain in 1965, African nationalist insurgents based in neighbouring and independent Zambia, Mozambique and Botswana infiltrated guerrillas and conducted an armed struggle from the late 1960s to 1979. Given international sanctions and loss of control of rural areas, white ruled Rhodesia eventually entered negotiations that produced independent and majority-ruled Zimbabwe in 1980.

White minority ruled South Africa administered neighbouring South West Africa, formerly a German colony, from the end of the First World War and faced a nationalist insurgency in the territory's northern region from the late 1960s to late 1980s.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

By Prof. Timothy J. Stapleton



Communist military advisors with MPLA troops in Angola, 1983. Source: Military Wikia

Strategically defeated in conventional warfare in southern Angola at the end of the 1980s, apartheid South Africa withdrew from South West Africa in 1989 with the territory becoming independent and majority ruled Namibia the next year.

Although the anti-apartheid movements struggled to mount operations in well-defended South Africa, independent and adjacent countries like Botswana, Mozambique and Botswana enabled insurgents to infiltrate across these borders to engage in armed struggle missions within the apartheid state.

Although Mozambique succumbed to South African military destabilization and expelled anti-apartheid forces in 1984, insurgents stepped up infiltration from Botswana launching limited attacks meant to inspire broader resistance. Ultimately, the end of the Cold War and the impact of international sanctions and internal protest prompted political change in South Africa and the advent of democracy in 1994.

TRACKING, ANTI-TRACKING, COUNTER-TRACKING: A FOCUS ON

By Dr. Kyt Lyn Walken



SADF Recce. Source: Military Wikia

The current tactical application of tracking owes a lot to a particular historical timeframe. Colonialism itself paid significant tribute to the most ancient and fundamental form of this skill.

“[...] Many years later, as an historian of war and society in Africa, I observed that academic and popular books and other works on counter-insurgency campaigns in Africa mentioned tracking as a central activity but did not discuss specific training or tactical doctrines around its use. The British officer Frank Kitson, who served in Kenya during the 1950s and later commanded land forces UK, called it the most important skill to deploy during counter-insurgency operations as a way to locate and eliminate elusive insurgents [...]” (Prof. Timothy J. Stapleton, interviewed by Kyt Lyn Walken, 2020)

TRACKING, ANTI-TRACKING, COUNTER-TRACKING: A FOCUS ON

By Dr. Kyt Lyn Walken



Source: Military Wikia

Natives used tracking all of their life, therefore the necessity for colonialists to counteract them with their own very skills, and on their own terrain (from the bush to the jungle) became mandatory.

Through close contact with indigenous people, European colonialists started to learn how to practise tracking and anti-tracking applying these skills to different situations.

Tracking in Africa can be still extremely easy or drastically tough, as it all depends on several factors: the terrain, the environment, the weather conditions, the physical fatigue, dangerous animals, the deprivations and so on.

Not to mention the counter tracking techniques employed by the guerrilla: ” [...] *they have to be elusive using the environment to conceal themselves while they engage in politicizing the masses and conducting hit-and-run attacks on enemy weak points. While counter-insurgent forces then use tracking to try to locate guerrillas, the guerrillas can use anti-tracking techniques in attempting to avoid detection.* [...]” (Prof. Timothy J. Stapleton)

TRACKING, ANTI-TRACKING, COUNTER-TRACKING: A FOCUS ON

By Dr. Kyt Lyn Walken



Selous Scouts on track. Source: Sofrep

The most common anti-tracking techniques employed in that specific period by the local guerrilla often seemed to be extremely difficult to detect.

This was particularly true due to the knowledge of the territory by locals as well as their ability in evading the trackers' pursuit.

Equally, many were the CTU (Combat Tracking Units) which stood out for skills, for the achieved results and the expertise they gained on field.

TRACKING, ANTI-TRACKING, COUNTER-TRACKING - A FOCUS ON

By Dr. Kyt Lyn Walken

“Of all the specialist activities relevant to the prosecution of a counter-insurgency campaign, none is more important than the provision of trackers.” – Frank Kitson, British counter-insurgency practitioner, and theorist

The expression *anti-tracking* stands for all the techniques and strategies employed to reduce the speed of the tracker and/or the whole Combat Tracking Unit, or to distract him/them from following the correct trackline.

In the worst cases, through the use of IED (Improvised Explosive Devices, such as Booby Traps, Claymore mines and so on), to even annihilate the Combat Tracking Unit (counter-tracking). Insurgents tried to eliminate counter-insurgency trackers.

There are three main categories in which we can actually cluster the most common counter-Tracking techniques employed: ***speed/distance, offensive, and deception.***

Taking note and sharing information of any anti or counter-Tracking strategy applied could mean saving the lives of the whole tracking unit.

In the pursuit of a counter-tracking operation, the enemy used to avoid any movement, break or disturbance that can easily give away his position.

Therefore, the enemy used to adopt the following precautions:

- stepping on hard surfaces
- avoiding to leave the geometry of the pattern of his shoes (even a portion of it) on soft terrain
- avoiding to bend vegetation that he could move
- avoiding to break vegetation that he could flex
- avoiding to cut any lower - upper part of the vegetation
- avoiding to start fires (et cetera)

The type of vegetation present in the environment represented a major factor in tracking and anti-tracking operations.

The biome of the savannah (and still) mainly consists of grasslands, studded by small bushes and Acacia Trees, Baobab and Euphorbia. The moist and mountainous eastern highlands consist of areas of tropical evergreen and hardwood forests, with a temperature range of 68° to 86° F (20° – 30° C).

Even if the temperatures weren't that severe, the presence of several potentially dangerous animals like lions, cheetahs, hyenas, leopards and even elephants turn it into a tough scenario. Not to mention the snakes.

Trackers also had to face deprivation, physical fatigue, and emotional stress. In addition to this, counter-Tracking techniques could become extremely difficult to detect at very first sight.

TRACKING, ANTI-TRACKING, COUNTER-TRACKING: A FOCUS ON

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Walking backwards, brushing out or camouflaging the tracks, walking inside a *wadi* (arabic word for ford), jumping from stone to stone or just walking on hard surfaces were among the most common techniques employed to evade the trackers.

Many of the toughest deception techniques to identify (which involved often a significant loss of time and resources) consisted of bomb shelling (splitting into different parties of people), changing direction at a certain point, wearing socks on boots, wearing boots without a specific pattern of the sole design, crossing a river, cutting the corner, laying blankets on the terrain and walking on them.

They were as various as the scenario and the situation. Most of them even appeared to be very creative, like the following boots.



32 Battalion Anti-Tracking Boots



Recce Elephant Anti-Tracking Boots



Rhodesian Anti-Tracking Boots



32 Battalion Jungle Anti-Tracking Boots

FLECHAS

“Arrows”

By Dr. Kyt Lyn Walken



Flechas member on patrol. Source: Military Wikia

Flechas were created by Sub- Inspector Oscar Cardoso as a branch of the PIDE, the Portuguese Secret Police; they remained active from 1967 to 1975 all over the two colonies of Portuguese Angola and Portuguese Mozambique. They mainly consisted of platoons of 30 trackers from ethnic groups (mostly Khoisan) whose expertise was patrolling, tracking and detecting any insurgent activity primarily in a specific area: the so called “*Terras do Fim do Mundo*” (Lands of the End of the World), corresponding to a remote part of eastern Angola.

“[...] Cardoso's concept of the flechas was to oppose the insurgents with a force of men who were comfortable with the wild and could live off the land [...] PIDE found that it helped to give detailed instructions to the Bushmen so they knew what was important in order to reduce vagueness and increase specificity [...]”. John Cann, “*The Flechas: Insurgent Hunting in Eastern Angola, 1965 1974*”

During the years, Flechas gained the respect of Portuguese Army and they started conducting joint operations.

Similar to the Koevoet, Flechas were known for their “*brutality and summary executions*” (Michael Radu (29 September 2017 - “*The New Insurgencies: Anti-communist Guerrillas in the Third World*”)

After 1975, some individuals from the Flechas formed the RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance), while others were enrolled into the Selous Scouts.

KOEVOET

“Crowbar” – “Operation K” – “SWAPOL-COIN”

By Dr. Kyt Lyn Walken



Koevoet on patrol. Source: Military Wikia

“When SWAPO infiltration began in the late 1960s the SAP was responsible for counter-insurgency in South West Africa and used trackers from the Bushmen minority and National Parks trackers, and tracker dogs to pursue insurgents. As members of historic hunter-gatherer communities, the Bushmen had a well-known reputation for tracking prowess” (Prof. Timothy J. Stapleton).

The South West African Police Counter-Insurgency unit or Koevoet meaning “Crowbar” was formed in 1979 and operated for the next ten years. It included white South African Police and Ovambo volunteers from northern South West Africa.

Their main task was focused on the South African Border War against the insurgents belonging to PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia). While they originally were involved in intelligence, they turned soon to be successful in leading operations.

PLAN insurgents engaged in bomb-shelling to try to elude the Koevoet trackers. Among the Anti-Tracking techniques adopted, the SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation) guerrillas tended to increase speed, creating the so called “*time and distance gap*”, and often resorted to using any vehicles, even sometimes horses, to increase it.

Since they were perfectly aware of the route of their chasers, they often used to set ambushes, employing landmines and IED. Koevoet patrols could last entire weeks, covering hundreds of kilometres, in search of any suspicious activity.

As a matter of fact, Jonas Paulus, an Angolan citizen who served in Koevoet, had been convicted for murder and rape.

This created a true scandal around the whole group, unveiling atrocities against civilians that took place during the operations led by Koevoet.

SELOUS SCOUTS

Named after the British explorer
Frederick Selous (1851 – 1917).

By Dr. Kyt Lyn Walken



Selous Scouts on track. Source: Sofrep

The Selous Scouts were formed as Special component of the Rhodesia Army in 1973 and they remained active till the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980.

Founded by Lieutenant Colonel Ronald Reid-Daly, the Selous Scouts consisted of recruits of both black and white personnel. Their task was focused on insurgent-controlled territory. They were employed to detect, face and even to predict any insurgent activity through gathering intelligence while on conducting patrols.

The unit achieved massive success, with 68% of all guerrilla deaths. Their severe training, focused on survival techniques as well as tracking, turned them into outstanding professionals, despite the outcome of the Rhodesian war.

Reid-Daly said: *“a special force soldier has to be a certain very special type of man. In his profile it is necessary to look for intelligence, fortitude and guts potential, loyalty, dedication, a deep sense of professionalism, maturity—the ideal age being 24 to 32 years—responsibility and self discipline... The person that the Scouts were looking for was a mix between the soldier who can work in a unit and a loner who can think and act on his feet”* (Source: SelousScoutstripod.com)

The Selous Scouts went down in history for their exceptional tracking skills and their endurance, as well as for their abilities in camouflage and concealment.