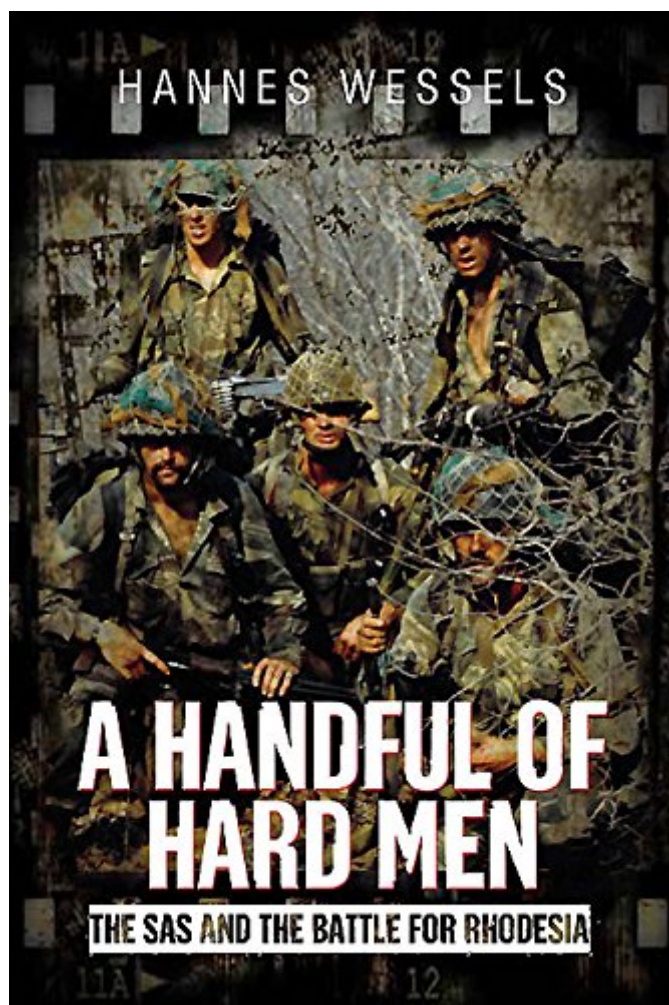


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A Handful Of Hard Men: The SAS And The Battle For Rhodesia



Synopsis

During the West's great transition into the post-Colonial age, the country of Rhodesia refused to succumb quietly, and throughout the 1970s fought back almost alone against Communist-supported elements that it did not believe would deliver proper governance. During this long war many heroes emerged, but none more skillful and courageous than Captain Darrell Watt of the Rhodesian SAS, who placed himself at the tip of the spear in the deadly battle to resist the forces of Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo. It is difficult to find another soldier's story to equal Watt's in terms of time spent on the field of battle and challenges faced. Even by the lofty standards of the SAS and Special Forces, one has to look far to find anyone who can match his record of resilience and valor in the face of such daunting odds and with resources so paltry. In the fight he showed himself to be a military maestro. A bush-lore genius, blessed with uncanny instincts and an unbridled determination to close with the enemy, he had no peers as a combat-tracker (and there was plenty of competition). But the Rhodesian theater was a fluid and volatile one in which he performed in almost every imaginable fighting role; as an airborne shock-trooper leading camp attacks, long range reconnaissance operator, covert urban operator, sniper, saboteur, seek-and-strike expert, and in the final stages as a key figure in mobilizing an allied army in neighboring Mozambique. After 12 years in the cauldron of war his cause slipped from beneath him, however, and Rhodesia gave way to Zimbabwe. When the guns went quiet Watt had won all his battles but lost the war. In this fascinating biography we learn that in his twilight years he is now concerned with saving wildlife on a continent where they are in continued danger, devoting himself to both the fauna and African people he has cared so deeply about.

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Customer Reviews

One of the first things that I appreciated about this book was that it was not the Author writing about how heroic the Author was. Even though Hannes Wessels certainly has enough material in his own life to legitimately pen such a book. Very quickly it was apparent that Hannes was writing about men he knew and admired; in particular Darrell Watts. The exploits of these men, set to the complex history of a gem in the African continent once known as Rhodesia. Hannes Wessels, like so many other Rhodesians, has deep pride in the nation he was born into. The complexities of post colonial southern Africa are impossible to understand without having experienced them. This is true the world over. Domestic issues cannot be appreciated by outsiders. It is unfair to judge from the other side of the planet while sipping a mocha latte. To quote a wise man: "Rhodesia found itself on the wrong side of history" History will be forced to acknowledge that the abandonment of Rhodesia and her values has turned out to be one of the greatest injustices that Africa, if not the world, has ever seen. These men fought against insurmountable odds under conditions that modern militaries have not experienced. Isolated, condemned, surrounded. Hard Men indeed. Had the battlespace been Vietnam, Europe or the middle east, then these men would have many movies made about them. Spartans at the Battle of Thermopylae are known as patriots fighting on their homeland. The Spartans pale in comparison with Rhodesians. Reading about the treachery and betrayal made me sweat. Reading about Darrell Watt tracking terrorists for days made me realize I cannot call myself a soldier next to him. Long Range Patrols? Not like this... I have learned that Darrell Watt is only one great soldier among many great soldiers, forced to step up and perform against odds that modern militaries would balk at, even with today's tech. **WDW** This book gave me a thirst to learn more about Rhodesia and the bush war. Hannes Wessels has done all involved a great service. Read, learn, investigate and reach your own informed opinion. *Nemo me impune lacessit.*

A most interesting book for those interested in serious special forces operations. It covers what is now a barely-known 1970s war in which a tiny force of Rhodesian Special Air Service soldiers took

on, and trounced, tens of thousands of insurgents trained and armed by the Soviet Union, China and Cuba and supported by virtually the entire Western world. Setting aside any feelings a reader might have about the rights and wrongs of a colonial remnant fighting to retain an unsustainable way of life, this book recounts a military epic. It is also a welcome change from the customary diet of special forces accounts of actions in Vietnam and the Middle East. Well written and structured, it is an excellent read, not to mention being a tour de force of what can be achieved in the face of terrible odds by a tiny number of highly skilled and totally committed soldiers.

Hennes Wessels tells a captivating tale that follows the SAS's contribution to the Rhodesian War from its very beginning until the bitter end through the eyes of respected operators, principally Darrell Watt, a legendary patrol leader who he moved up through the ranks from trooper to captain, and who some credited with holding the SAS together when important numbers of operators were following Ron Reid-Daly into the Selous Scouts . But also Richard Stannard, Andre Scheepers, Bob McKenzie , a 101st Airborne Vietnam veteran, and several South Africans. Woven into accounts of recon missions and raids, largely outside of Rhodesia, is a sparse historical narrative that puts the Rhodesian conflict and the international pressures it was subject to in scathing perspective. Potentially mortal diplomatic wounds could come from something as remote as a coup in Portugal, Jimmy Carter's election in the United States, or his selection of Andrew Young as Ambassador to the U.N.. Decent men whose ignorance of Rhodesia and its peoples, and their inability to distinguish between South African Apartheid and the easy if paternalistic race relations of Rhodesia, borders on the criminal. You know there is no happy ending, but you'll come away with a deep admiration for those who chose to fight for a better country than the sordid klepto-dictatorship it became.

The first book about the Rhodesian War that I read, focused solely on Operation Dingo in november 1977, written by Ian Pringle. When I first started, I could not stop. These people achieved so much with so little for such a long time. What really fascinated me was how well the Rhodesians adopted to the situation, in spite of the tremendous odds they faced. Both from communist-backed guerillas and the ignorant liberal politicians of the Western governments, especially from the US and the UK. This book provides a detailed inside view of the Rhodesian SAS, its handful, but tough as hell operators, the raids and the operations they conducted into neighboring countries against terrorist training camps and bases. Which was portrayed as refugee camps in the media. At the end, to me at least, it almost felt like the Rhodesians were on the brink of actually winning the war.

Mugabe's forces was on their last legs in Mozambique and Zambia because of the SAS, and just a little bit more pressure would have brought them down. But then a political backroom deal sealed the fate of this once great country. After reading just these two books, Operation Dingo and this one, I have decided to remember this country as Rhodesia, and not Zimbabwe. Ever since Mugabe's taking power in 1980, this once well-functioning nation has been totally destroyed. Such a sad and undeserved ending to a such promising African country.

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