

the Liberation Struggle in Zimbabwe

AFRICAN FREEDOM FIGHTERS SPEAK FOR THEM- SELVES



ZANLA Cadre's Experience
ZANLA Women's Detachment



ZANU and ZANLA "operational zones" are in the northern, northeastern, and eastern sectors of Zimbabwe. According to ZANU, a zone of more than 50,000 square miles has been liberated, with a total population of about 3 million.



The collapse of Portuguese colonial rule in Southern Africa has quickened the pace of the struggle to liberate all of Africa from white domination. Only Zimbabwe ("Rhodesia"), Azania ("South Africa"), and Namibia ("Southwest Africa") remain under the political control of illegal white minority governments. But those governments are backed up by the armed might of the United States and NATO.

Until Mozambique was liberated, Zimbabwe's longest border was flanked by a government friendly to Jan Smith's racist regime. Today, Zimbabwe is nearly isolated, surrounded by independent black-ruled countries except for its relatively small area that borders on South Africa.

In this pamphlet, two freedom fighters of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), the military arm of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), tell their own stories of the struggle for liberation. ZANLA is the strongest military force of freedom fighters in Zimbabwe at the present time. In recent months, ZANLA freedom fighters have been able to strike within 30 miles of Salisbury, Smith's capital city.

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In the new community of ZANLA, I was treated as an equal. We did the same tasks as male comrades. We performed patrol duties, carried war material, guarded our bases, and cooked in turns with our male comrades. We were frequently given missions through villages and sneaked around Boer military posts. Although such tasks were sometimes painstaking and tiresome, we enjoyed ourselves enormously, because we always took comfort in the fact that we fought the Boers when prepared and when we wanted, and that we received abundant support from the masses. We recruited more female comrades who have since swelled our ranks. We now have a ZANLA Women's Detachment, which has been instrumental in sharpening our ideological thinking.

It is heartening to see the broad masses of women in Zimbabwe join ZANU and their male comrades in fighting against the racist government of Ian Smith. Women of Zimbabwe rise up and take part in social revolution. We are a decisive force in the success or failure of the Zimbabwe revolution.

Sarudzai Churucheminziva

For more information about ZANU, write to:
Zimbabwe African National Union
Tapson A. Mawere, Chief Representative
89-09 162nd Street
Jamaica, NY 11432
Phone (212) 291-8039

Additional copies of this pamphlet may be ordered from:
ZANU Support Committee
Box 6289
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To our dismay the comrades were reluctant to show us how to handle a gun. They were more interested in our grievances than in our interests to fight the Boers or our unprecedented excitement over arms. Two weeks were therefore reserved for analyzing our grievances against the Boers and the reasons why political understanding takes precedence over military action. After the political education, the comrades introduced us to the rigors of the strategy and tactics of guerrilla warfare. This was the most fascinating part of the training. We enjoyed it most, since as women we felt pride in being able to tackle tasks which, at home, our village people regarded as men's tasks.

A small ground was prepared for us to practice the handling of a gun and the tactics of guerrilla warfare. The male comrades lent us two pairs of trousers for training. A sense of pride grew in us, being the only women in the camp of men and being in possession of a weapon. We moved proudly up and down the camp. The comrades soon realized this misconception within us and occasionally took our guns away from us. Before giving us back our guns, they gave us lectures in correcting this political misunderstanding on our part.

One commissar told us: "A gun is not an object for you to use as an instrument of showing off, neither is it a certificate that you are equal to men comrades. A gun is only for killing the fascist soldiers of Ian Smith and the eradication of racial discrimination, capitalism, and exploitation in Zimbabwe. It will be given to someone who has the full understanding of the importance of the gun. Such a person deserves the title: *Soldier of the People.*"

We grasped more of this point when one day we were included in a section of male comrades destined for an ambush along an enemy road. When enemy puppet troops returned our fire, their bullets whizzed past near my ears. The only thing for me was to open up my submachine gun and resolutely direct my fire towards the direction where the enemy was. To my relief, the enemy gave up after a few minutes of our fierce and concerted attack. Then I learned more of the use of my submachine gun. It's either you kill the Boer or the Boer kills you. With more of such experiences in ZANLA, we became more enlightened about our convictions and our freedom-bound duty.

MY EXPERIENCES AS A ZANLA CADRE IN THE NORTHEAST

"*We are our own liberators,*" declared President Comrade Ndabaningi Sithole at the 1964 Gwelo Congress of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU).

Sithole's words reverberated far and wide in Zimbabwe. Young as I was, I was tremendously inspired by Sithole's words. I was determined to join ZANU and vowed to fight for the liberation of the fatherland.

The dream came true in 1972 when a group of us Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) cadres opened up a front in the northeast of Zimbabwe.

Before we launched our operations, we engaged in political work preparing our people for a bitter and protracted struggle. Every cadre of ZANLA is a politically conscious soldier. He knows the aims of the struggle and the program of the party. He sets an example to the masses.

Our early preparations were mainly concerned with political work. We analyzed the grievances of the masses—personal tax, contour ridges, poor soil, small plots of land, destocking of cattle, etc. We did not have problems explaining these grievances to the masses because our people know the evils of the foreign white capitalists in Zimbabwe. Their only difficulty is to overcome their fear of the enemy. This is revealed in some of the questions they asked us: How can we defeat the whites who are well armed and well equipped? Do you have arms? What will happen to my property, my cattle, my children? Will we not be arrested and detained?

We tried to answer these questions as frankly and honestly as humanly possible. We never lied to them. We told them that yes, Smith was well armed and had better weapons. But we also told them that although we had fewer arms, we were to fight with these arms until our country was free. We also told them that as long as they supported us, fed us, protected us, the enemy could not defeat us. We also told them that because Smith has no support from the people he is not powerful.

At first the masses did not believe the things we were telling them. But after discussions and persuasion, most of

them saw the truth about our intentions. We were also particularly helped by the war in Mozambique where freedom fighters had scored major victories. Some of the masses had heard stories about Portuguese and Rhodesian forces being killed or wounded by freedom fighters in Mozambique. Even at this early stage, hundreds of the masses were enthusiastic to join the struggle.

The next phase of our preparations involved the transportation of arms for long distances under exacting conditions. The transportation of arms requires courage and self-sacrifice. One carries a heavy kit bag containing arms, food, water, etc. for days or weeks. But this heavy task was reduced to something fascinating because it involved little kids, girls and boys, women and men. And of course for a real revolutionary no hardship is too great. Now the situation is much different as the masses understand and feed us on our way.

When the masses saw the guns--the machine guns, the bazookas, the mines--they danced with excitement and joy. Some just wanted to touch the weapons, others wanted to keep arms for themselves so they could confront the white farmers themselves. They were very disappointed when we did not give them guns. They were also disappointed with our delay in launching the operations. We could not help it because in guerrilla warfare we cannot afford to give people arms without making sure whether the arms will be used for a genuine cause or not. Furthermore, as guerrilla fighters we had ourselves to determine whether the conditions were favorable and suitable to launch an offensive or not, but certainly not to be guided by the whims of the masses.

What impressed us most, even at this early stage, was the enthusiasm of our people. Almost all of them expressed the feeling that this was all they had been waiting for. Hundreds came forward to join ZANLA, and also to transport weapons.

One final step we had to take was to test the masses, to see if they meant what they said. For several months we sent out literally hundreds of them on party missions and gathering information about the enemy. About 99 percent of these missions were successful. Only a few mishaps took place. We expected a worse situation than this.

After we had transported enough material and were

ZANLA WOMEN'S DETACHMENT

It was a revelation to me and my village when the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) opened my way to the struggle in Zimbabwe in 1972. ZANLA heroically laid down roots in the northeast regions of Zimbabwe. Everyone began to revive hope for freedom, and the news spread around the villages like wild fire. ZANLA spoke of the liberation of the poor and exploited, and the smashing of capitalism in Zimbabwe.

The idea of joining ZANLA didn't take long for me. My chief problem was to find ZANLA. The presence of ZANLA in Zimbabwe was unquestioned, but during the initial stages it needed concerted efforts on one's part to find the "ZANLA underground." However, as time went on this "ZANLA underground" began to uncover itself, and its footholds began to be more defined in the northeastern regions--Shamva, Mazoe, Mtoko, Mrewa, Bindura, Mt. Darwin, Centenary, and Sipolilo districts.

So a girlfriend of mine and myself decided to take the challenge and hunt for ZANLA in areas infested with gossip about ZANLA activities. It took us a few weeks of search and investigation around villages to find a ZANLA base. This particular base was situated along a small stream between small hills, and the area was marked by thick vegetation. Before we got into this base we went through a very vigilant sentry, so strategically situated that we couldn't enter the base without being noticed.

Having convinced the sentry about the faithfulness of our mission and our intentions, we were passed on to the comrade in charge of the base. The commander of this base, a very young fighter, interrogated us on the reasons why we wanted to join ZANLA. To our surprise, we were treated very cordially, thus removing all false impressions about freedom fighters that had been fed to us by the puppet troops when we were in our village. All the fighters in this base were very young, most still in their teens, and very joyful and quite unworried about the ponderous machinations of the so-called security forces. We were admitted into ZANLA, thus fulfilling our long and much awaited dreams.

masses in our operational zones are much happier and freer than the people in areas under complete enemy control. People in our operational zones are no longer harassed for personal taxes, dog taxes, etc., since the Smith regime hasn't enough personnel to do this job in these areas.



fully convinced that the masses were behind us and understood ZANU's war aims and program, we launched our offensive.

Before mounting an attack on a target, we carefully surveyed the area to make sure there are escape routes. Our targets were selected for their strategic value. We never attacked a target until we were sure that it was used by the enemy in one way or another. Our major targets were mostly military posts, police camps, homes of white police and army reservists, or farms used as command posts. We never attacked African or white civilians.

Our tactics involved surprise attacks, ambushes and laying of mines. Our attacks were so quick and swift that we disappeared before the fascist enemy troops got a chance to fire back. The swiftness of our tactics amazed the masses. They thought and still think that we use magic. Stories spread around the villages that freedom fighters turn into logs or snakes or bush at the approach of settler forces.

We mounted our attacks when we wanted. Only on a few occasions were we forced to launch an attack unprepared. But this was an exception rather than the rule. Most of our attacks were launched at night. This had the effect of putting off the effectiveness and superiority of the enemy forces because they mostly use helicopters and planes which are not useful at night. Let me give you an example of one of the battles we fought against the enemy all day long.

A group of us was escorting a large number of recruits through some villages. We were armed with one hand mortar with 20 live shells, 2 light machine guns, 15 submachine guns. We camped on a small stream. On both sides of the stream were villages whose inhabitants were our supporters. Information had leaked to the enemy about our activities. We had been holding frequent mass meetings in this area for several days. The next day the enemy soldiers arrived, but were not sure of the definite place where we had camped. We spotted the enemy first. There must have been 40 of them approaching our camp in battle formation. We sent two comrades to move away with the recruits, and the rest took positions along the stream and fired at the enemy first. Our fire was so effective that we could even see the enemy tumbling down, one by one. However, enemy fire came from another

group which we had not spotted. Three rapid shells of the mortar silenced them easily.

Thirty minutes later, enemy planes (a spotter plane and two helicopters) came with reinforcements. The helicopters circled the spot where the battle had taken place, firing aimlessly without realizing that we had just made a swift escape. One of the helicopters landed and carried off the casualties. Unfortunately we were spotted by the spotter plane which dived low within our firing range, trying to drop grenades on us. Our strong gunfire caused much damage to the plane. Immediately huge waves of smoke gushed out of the plane as it flew away uncontrolled. We saw the plane crash and explode on a mountain, and according to reports from the local masses, the enemy never recovered the plane, fearing that we had mined the place where it crashed.

This battle took place in an open terrain, and the local masses saw everything that took place there, and were very excited to see the enemy being killed in broad daylight.

We came out of this battle victorious. As we marched along the road singing and shouting revolutionary songs and slogans, the masses applauded and lulled. The recruits, too, were joyful and excited with our fighting ability.

This battle demonstrated to the enemy that we also fight him even during the day, and that his airplanes can do no harm to us. It also proved to the masses that what they are told by Smith's soldiers is untrue. The enemy soldiers used to tell the masses that when freedom fighters come across enemy soldiers, they run away without fighting, and that the enemy killed many comrades in the battlefield. But in this battle the masses could see for themselves that not a single comrade was injured or killed. Instead nine enemy soldiers were killed, and several wounded, and a plane destroyed.

The masses in our operational zones are highly impressed with our courage, our determination, our conviction, and our capacity to endure hardships. Now they no longer ask us questions about whether we can defeat the enemy or not, but how soon, and how we manage to escape enemy planes and bullets. The masses can see for themselves that enemy power is weakening. The fascist Smith troops are proving to be not as strong as they had always appeared to be. ZANLA forces are proving their superiority over enemy troops.

The Smith fascist troops are of course, mercenaries, and as such are very much politically divided. Some, like the African members of the South African forces, tell the masses about their dislike of the war, and do not do their duties accordingly. Others are plainly afraid to track us in the bush. Smith's soldiers are not used to hard conditions of guerrilla warfare, and they depend for their information about our activities on no one.

To show that the enemy is desperately in need of information, he has been dropping leaflets all over our operational zones which promised, among other things, large sums of money to:

- (a) Anyone who tells the security forces about the movements of our units,
- (b) Anyone who shows the security forces our hideouts or our war materiel dumps,
- (c) The largest sum would go to anyone who captures a freedom fighter and hands him over to security forces.

The enemy leaflets also encourage us to surrender, and promise large sums of money to any of us who surrenders. What the enemy does not know is that we do not fight for money in Zimbabwe; we are not mercenaries. We are revolutionaries determined to fight bitterly until the liberation of our fatherland. On top of that we have taught the masses the evil tactics employed by the fascists. The masses remain adamant in their support for the struggle wherever they are.

We have been successful in our operational zones because our party, ZANU, has a correct revolutionary leadership. Its aims and programs and correct political line transcend tribalism, sectionalism, and regionalism. We are trained to put individual interests behind and national interests forward. Our activities in the front line reflect the general orientation of our party. We do not lie to our people, we do not promise them easy victories, we do not take advantage of them. Whatever we get is given to us by the masses on their own.

One final note to my experience is that we, the ZANLA cadres, feel much freer and happier than the people who are not fighting or who live in the cities. We do not have to follow or comply with the regulations or policies of the enemy. The