

South Africa wages secret war of terror

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Battalion for nine months, came on leave to Britain at Christmas and then decided to desert to tell his tale. The result is the first account of this shadowy unit.

On paper there is nothing to distinguish 32 Battalion from the dozens of other South African units fighting in Namibia against SWAPO. But, unlike any other units, 32 is almost entirely composed of foreigners.

It has a few South African regulars, but most of its white NCOs are mercenaries, many of them British, and its ranks are filled with Portuguese-speaking black Angolans, all recruited from the FNLA—another Angolan liberation movement.

Occasionally, elements of 32 Battalion enter Angola in a "regular" manner—in South African Defence Force uniforms, carrying normal military identity papers and dog tags, and using standard weapons. But, most of the time—and the unit aims to have two companies in Angola continually—they fight a very different kind of war.

Dressed in unmarked camouflage uniforms, under strict orders to carry no documents of any type, and using East European weapons, they move into Angola for sweeps through groups of villages. White officers and NCOs black their faces. A typical operation, as described by Edwards, would

involve a formation of one or two platoons moving through a village area gunning down men, women, children, and livestock.

In such sweeps they sometimes find, among the corpses, a few armed men—who may or may not have been SWAPO—but as Edwards makes clear most of the dead are civilians.

After describing the killing of one group of adults and children who had torn off their clothes to show they were unharmed, Edwards told Davies: "I have had enough of it and I just thought people ought to know what we have been doing out there."

Asked yesterday to comment on the gist of Mr Edwards's story, the South African Ambassador in London, Mr Marais Steyn, said: "From what we have been told of the contents, it seems to be such a concoction of untruth, to a large extent emanating from a single individual with the moral fibre of a deserter, that we feel it is impossible to comment on it unless we have seen the full text and have had a chance to analyse the full extent of the distortions published, even though unwittingly, in your newspaper."

Earlier this week in Luanda, Angola's deputy minister of defence, Colonel David Moises gave details of a number of South African "special operations" seen from the Angolan side.

The dead pilot of a South African Alouette helicopter shot down in Angola last October was found to have the word Rhodesia tattooed on his chest, the colonel said, arguing that this proved the South Africans, who have always denied employing mercenaries, are doing so.

During 1980, he added, there had been 925 reconnaissance flights over Angola, 81 air attacks, and 33 assaults by airborne troops.

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South Africa's secret war of terror

Southern Angola is Pretoria's front line in the war against SWAPO guerrillas fighting to control Namibia. Now reports from the combat zone indicate suffering and destruction far higher than publicly admitted

SOUTH Africa's military operations in southern Angola have grown to such an extent that it is now waging a full-scale war far from its own borders.

Apart from increasingly frequent incursions into Angola with regular ground and air forces, the South Africans are also using covert units which, posing as anti-government guerrillas, are engaged in a brutal campaign north of the border between Namibia and Angola.

The war followed South Africa's decision to make Angola its "front line" against guerrillas of SWAPO (South-West African Peoples Organisation), the liberation movement fighting to wrest control of Namibia from Pretoria.

In the five years since the Angolan civil war the South Africans have repeatedly claimed that their operations in Angola are conducted entirely by regular forces, specifically aimed at SWAPO

camps and installations and usually ordered only in direct response to SWAPO strikes in Namibia.

Reports from Jonathan Steele in the Angolan war zone, where he has seen the devastation wrought by the South Africans, and from Nick Davies in London, piecing together the story of South Africa's secret "Bai-

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falo Regiment," paint a very different picture.

Davies' investigation, based on interviews with a British deserter from the "Buffalo Regiment," more formally known as the 32 Battalion, show that South Africa has decided that an essential part of its war is the deliberate killing and terrorising of Angolan civilians in any area where SWAPO might find support or help.

A further refinement is

that the covert units of 32 battalion pass off much of their dirty work as that of UNITA, the Angolan liberation movement which was defeated in the civil war but which hangs on in that country in unofficial alliance with the South Africans.

South Africa thus gains a political bonus, in addition to any military objectives achieved, by projecting the image that UNITA's popular support and fighting power are unimpaired, whereas most observers believe that both have greatly diminished. Steele's report makes equally clear that while the South Africans have attacked the few SWAPO installations within their range, most of their recent assaults have been on purely Angolan targets — villages, roads, bridges and military camps.

The conclusion from the two reports must be not only that the restraint South Africa claims to be observing are pure fiction but that the scale of the suffering and destruction inflicted by its forces — both regular and secret — goes well beyond what has been previously publicly known.

In his tour of southern Angola Steele reports that South African attacks are directed at least as much against Angola as against their official enemy, SWAPO.

Within that larger campaign is the "secret war" — almost entirely directed against villagers — waged by, among others, Trevor John Edwards, the British mercenary who has told his story to the Guardian and to Thames Television, who will broadcast an interview with him tonight.

Edwards served with 32 Battalion in Angola. Turn to back page, col. 1



Trevor Edwards, the British mercenary: "I have had enough"

