



Fighting for Time: Rhodesia's Military and Zimbabwe's Independence

by Charles D. Melson.

Philadelphia: Casemate, 2021. Pp. xi, 316. ISBN 978-1-95271-506-8.

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In *Fighting for Time* Charles Melson, formerly Chief Historian for the US Marine Corps, sets himself a simple but challenging task: to ascertain what modern (esp. American) military practitioners (5) may learn from a past counterinsurgency campaign, specifically the Zimbabwean war for independence (1964-79). Researching this conflict is difficult because relevant documents are often inaccessible and former combatants are reluctant to speak about their experiences. Furthermore, the existing historiography of the war is dominated by former Rhodesian Army soldiers with an ax to grind. Melson has overcome some, but not all these obstacles.

The volume's eight chapters concern discrete aspects of the structure, organization, and tactics of the Rhodesian military machine. Chapter 1 sets the stage (too succinctly) for the rest of the book by setting the context of the war and the colonial heritage of the Rhodesian military. Later chapters examine, in varying detail, special operations forces, the role of the Rhodesian Air Force, and tactical innovations.

There is also a robust discussion of the tactics used in Rhodesian cross-border operations (chap. 7). A brief chapter addresses unconventional warfare including the Rhodesian role in the creation of RENAMO (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana) in Mozambique, among several other controversial covert programs. The author's short discussions of Operations Hectiv and Quartz will leave readers wanting more details about these shadowy programs. Five appendices cover the history of the FN Rifle, the Rhodesian order of battle, and the chronology of the war among other topics.

The author has clearly had extensive access to the Rhodesian Army Archives as well as the documents held by many of the Rhodesian ex-servicemen's organizations. Additionally, Melson cites an extensive list of individuals he corresponded with in researching his book. These range from numerous Rhodesian veterans to some well known scholars in the field. However, his frequent use of large block quotations of various sources and excursions into minute tactical details make it hard for the reader to keep pace with all the points being stressed.

Those not extremely familiar with the conflict will find too little guidance on the conflict's setting in chap. 1. They may also be confused by the title; while it alludes to Zimbabwe's *independence*, the book rarely mentions liberation movements in any detail and stops short of covering the actual transition to independence.

While the book does cover the overall impact of the air force in the war Melson would have benefited by using the findings in Darlington Mutanda's book *The Rhodesian Air Force in Zimbabwe's War of Liberation, 1966-1980*.¹ Mutanda examines both the tactics of the air force in the conflict and the liberation fighters' perspective on airpower. In general, Melson's deep dive into

1. NY: McFarland, 2016.

tactics throughout would have benefited from a more detailed look at liberation forces' adaptation to the threat posed by Rhodesian forces.

Military officers with a keen interest in tactics will value *Fighting for Time* for its stimulating coverage of many aspects of combat not typically found in traditional military histories. Readers interested in airpower and its application in low intensity conflict will find the book to be packed with information on the roles of tactical airlift and close air support. It is less well suited for readers seeking a clear and balanced introduction to the complex history of Rhodesia's military and Zimbabwe's independence.