

# Foreign veterans flock to Rhodesian army

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — About 1,200 foreigners, 400 of them Americans, have joined the Rhodesian army in its war against black nationalist guerrillas.

These men, also from Britain, Australia, Portugal, South Africa, Canada and several other European countries, are largely leftovers from conflicts elsewhere in Africa, Vietnam and Northern Ireland.

Most are in their 20s or early 30s. Some couldn't find jobs when they returned home from other wars. Most gravitated to Rhodesia as one of the few places today where a man can escape the boredom of civilian living by putting his life on the line.

The Rhodesian government is reluctant to talk about the foreigners in its 6,000-man army and is annoyed by any reference to them as mercenaries. Technically, the men are immigrants who happen to join the armed forces of Prime Minister Ian Smith's white minority regime to fight in the escalating four-year-old guerrilla war. The usual hitch is three years.

Rhodesian military sources insist it is not unlike immigrants joining the American or British armies.

Land-locked Rhodesia is a former British colony of 272,000 whites and 6.4 million blacks. It unilaterally declared its independence from Britain in 1965 to avoid sharing power with blacks, but last September Smith committed his government to eventually hand over the government to the black majority. Negotiations in Geneva with black nationalists broke down because of differences over the makeup and time span of the interim government.

Most recruits learn of Rhodesian army opportunities by word of mouth spread among buddies from old wars. The government, however, does some advertising in hunting and gun magazines.

One of the largest ads appears on the back cover of Soldier of Fortune magazine in the United States. It shows the silhouette of an infantryman running with a rifle. The caption says, "Join the Rhodesian army."

The Rhodesian government says it does not make promises to prospective recruits, some of whom have been disillusioned by expectations of receiving a higher rank than previously held.

A regular infantryman, known as a trooper, is paid about \$600 a

month. A captain, depending on experience and time in service, may earn \$750 to \$900.

New arrivals, most of whom reach Salisbury through South Africa, fill out forms noting their military background, then are sent for training, during which they are evaluated and given a rank.

A former American Special Forces helicopter pilot was assigned as a training instructor, while a former U.S. Marine captain was initially a first lieutenant but after a year was promoted to captain.

The foreigners are not easy to find. They stay in the so-called operation areas — military zones along the borders — and are spread out so there are only a few in each unit. Reporters occasionally run across some of the foreig-

ners in chance meetings in the field or in a bar.

In the past month, eight foreigners deserted the army and fled to the neighboring black-ruled countries of Botswana or Zambia. One was arrested in South Africa and returned to Rhodesia.

Police said one group of three American deserters stole a private plane in Salisbury and flew off for Zambia. The mother of one of them, Dennis Robert Pearce of Phoenix, Ariz., said her 29-year-old son felt Rhodesian military officials did not live up to promises of high rank and high pay.

"You've got deserters in every army," said one Rhodesian recruiter. "We can do without the sort that want to desert."

The Rhodesian military is stern

on secrecy and troopers are cautioned against careless talk for which they can be imprisoned.

One American in the elite Selous Scouts said he would like to be able to tell people how successful their operations have been. The Selous Scouts make occasional raids deep into Mozambique where the bulk of the black nationalist guerrillas have their camps. Unlike in Vietnam, the chance of a government infantryman being killed in Rhodesia appears slight. In four years of conflict, the Salisbury government says about 235 Rhodesian military men have been killed in action while more than 2,400 guerrilla or guerrilla suspects have been killed. Only a handful of the dead were foreigners.

Military sources said the

Rhodesian army generally operates in small groups, sets frequent ambushes, hits hard and moves fast. If outnumbered, Rhodesian troops can call in reinforcements by helicopter. They rarely use artillery, and an airstrike from one of the aging British-built Vampire or Hunter jets is a luxury.

Most of the regular Rhodesian army is composed of black volunteers led by white Rhodesian or foreign officers. The black guerrillas, by comparison, are poorly led and have had insufficient training.

Observers familiar with other wars say the Rhodesian military is a first-rate counter-insurgent force. Smith says it could keep the insurgents at bay for 10 years or more.

Most people expect a political settlement to come before that.



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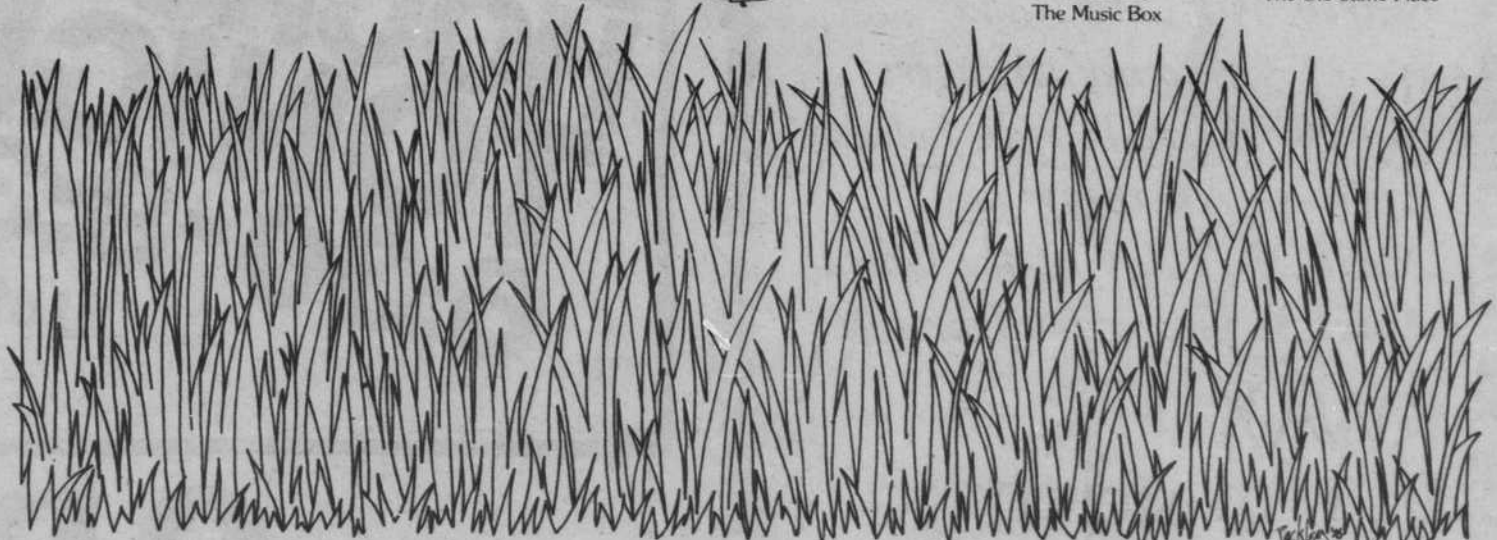
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