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Operation Miracle

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Prop Geldenhuys, Bob Manser, John McKenzie and assisted by Eddie Norris Compiled by the author of 'Rhodesian Air Force Operations: With Air Strike Log' and 'Nickel Cross', both available on this website. Operation Miracle is a fascinating story. The Operation consisted of attacks on five well defended ZANLA camps forming the core of the Chimoio Circle that was spread over a large mountainous area of which Monte Cassino was the prominent feature. From an Air Force perspective, this story is, in a nutshell, a sincere tribute to three bold airmen, KIA 3 October 1979. They lie in unmarked graves, God alone knows where. Selous Scout Trooper Gert O'Neill was killed on Day 1 of Operation Miracle, clearing trenches; Trooper Ted Mann was tragically killed later when a captured weapon exploded while being made safe. Their bodies were repatriated and given decent burials. The aircrew that the book honours are Hunter pilot Brian Gordon, and Canberra crew Kevin Peinke and JJ Strydom (SAAF navigator on secondment). They were killed on Day 5 of Operation Miracle, after most of the ground troops had withdrawn from the battle field. Two months later, the ceasefire of the bush war was declared, followed four months later by a change of Government - a Government who was really not interested in recovering the aircrew (bodies) who had paid the supreme sacrifice in the defence of their country. Former airman Bob Manser set out in July 2007 and not only found the Hunter crash site, but managed to recover parts of the wreckage (metal is a valuable commodity - metal collectors scavenge the countryside to sell scrap to China). Then in November, Bob found the Canberra crash site - and again, miraculously, recovered bits of aircraft wreckage. However, more importantly, when the story broke, Eddy Norris of ORAF's fame, via his fantastic network, flashed the news across the globe generated a magnificent response literally from all four corners of our planet. With Eddy Norris's help, the relatives of all three airmen killed in action were traced. Meanwhile, John 'Kutanga Mac' McKenzie, started fashioning a Memorial, at great personal sacrifice, coupled with his ingenuity, to commemorate the event that occurred 29 years ago. With all this information, 'Kutanga Mac' and the author decided to arrange an 'Unveiling of the Miracle Memorial' reunion in Durban, South Africa, together with the launch of this book on the 29th anniversary date - i.e. 3 October 2008 JDP, Oct 2008. Softback A5, 160 pages. Colour and B/W photos

What is it that makes Op Miracle so unique? It was certainly not the first time that the Rhodesian Forces had carried out bold attacks on the enemy, beyond their borders. Nor was it significant in the size of the air or ground effort employed by them. But it was a time when the emphasis was moving inexorably from a bush conflict into a war with sophisticated weapons and technology. The advantage of air superiority, long enjoyed by the Rhodesian Air Force was slipping away.

The crew flying on air operations were well aware that the risks, particularly on cross-border missions, were becoming very high. Negotiations for a political settlement were underway. Only six short months after Op Miracle, a new government would take over the country.

Many Rhodesians had already left their homeland even as it became obvious that the war was drawing to a weary end. The combatants were mentally and physically exhausted and were clamouring for peace. It was at this time of change that Op Miracle demanded one last, big effort from the Air Force. This was given as always, with courage and determination.

These are the qualities that we now seek to honour and remember after all the years.

Op Miracle symbolises all that was courageous and audacious in the fighting men and women of Rhodesia. It is a tribute to those that made the ultimate sacrifice.â€•

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Geldenhuys, Manser and McKenzie



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Author "Prop" Preller Geldenhuys

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