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Keywords : *confrontation, Crocodile Gang, nationalists, Oberholtzer, oppression, ZANU.*

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I. Introduction

This paper endeavours to expose the little known history of the 'Crocodile Gang' (CG).[i] This was a five member ZANU commando unit deployed in the Melsetter district of Manicaland in 1964 following the first ZANU Congress held in Gwelo in May 1964. The CG was led by William Ndangana and included James Dhamini, Victor Mlambo, Master Tresha Mazwani and Amos Kademaunga. The group was assigned to conduct sabotage activities against the recalcitrant regime of Ian Smith and their activities culminated in the stabbing to death of a white man, Pieter Johannes Andries Oberholtzer at a makeshift roadblock on 4 July 1964. Subsequently, Oberholtzer has been recorded as the first white man to die in an act of war since the First Chimurenga of 1896/7 (Sadomba 2011: 11, Bhebe 1999:28). It is the author's contention that the group's activities inaugurated the Second Chimurenga war. The killing of Oberholtzer was a landmark development in the history of the struggle against white oppression as it had the effect of removing the psychological hurdle of the fear of white species by many blacks. The killing became a morale booster and indeed a turning point in the struggle to dislodge white rule.

The activities of the CG 'came as an inevitable climax to an atmosphere of increasing repression on the part of the whites and an increasing hostility on the part of the blacks' (Raeburn 1981:1). Rhodesian politics was increasingly being guided by white supremacy: 'the white man's keep-down-the-nigger policy' (Sithole 1959:28) and legislation since 1959 had turned the country into a police state. In 1959, Whitehead's government had declared a State of Emergency (Rasmussen 1990: xxviii) that allowed it to enact a series of draconian laws such as the 1959 Unlawful Organisations Act (Rasmussen 1990:374). Further, in response to the upsurge of nationalist political violence the government enacted a series of repressive laws such as the Preventive Detention Act, the Native Affairs Amendment Act and the notorious 1960 Law and Order (Maintenance) Act (LOMA). LOMA was specifically designed 'to make further provision for the maintenance of law and order in Rhodesia; to provide for the prohibition in the public interest of the printing, publication, dissemination and possession of certain publications…' which the government deemed injurious (The Statute Law of Southern Rhodesia, No. 53, 1960:225). African nationalists were given all kind of names such as 'terrorists and hooligans' (Whyte 1990:126). The police were given excessive powers to arbitrarily search a suspect's home and arrest him/her without a warrant of arrest (The Statute Law of Southern Rhodesia, No. 12, 1963:37). The police were further empowered to declare any group of three or more people an 'unlawful assembly' (Rasmussen 1990:163). Further, District Commissioners were empowered to control public assemblies and movements. They could prohibit any meeting if they deemed that it was likely to cause public disorder. People were barred from attending 'unlawful political gatherings'. When the ultra-conservative and racist Ian Smith took power from Field in April 1964 he immediately declared that there would be no African government in his life time (Ellert 1993:3). This declaration was followed by concerted efforts to suppress nationalist political activities.

Under LOMA and its subsequent amendments (the most noted of which was the provision for a mandatory death sentence for what were perceived as violent acts), hundreds were rounded up and detained without trial. LOMA became the cornerstone of Rhodesia's oppressive security legislation. Section 37 of the notorious act specifically stated that any person who set or attempted to set on fire any inflammable liquid or

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explosive even on an empty building, vehicle or structure would be sentenced to death (The Statute Law of Southern Rhodesia, No. 12, 1963:34-35). Nationalist parties were banned in a row. The African National Congress (ANC) was banned on 25 February 1959 (Whyte 1990:132) and its successor, the National Democratic Party (NDP) also banned in December 1961. The Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) was banned in September 1962 following a short lifespan. Its leadership was arrested, detained and some fled into exile. Its successor, the People's Caretaker Council (PCC) was to suffer the same fate. These actions only served to strengthen the African resolve to intensify their demand for independence.

II. African Nationalism Before 1964

In order to situate the CG in its proper historical context, it is imperative to start off by examining the nature of African protests that precede it. During the pre-1964 era, African nationalists had largely exerted their energies into attaining independence through the non-confrontational constitutional route that had been successfully pursued by their northern neighbours in their struggles for independence. For Southern Rhodesia, this route turned out to be full of hurdles as the entrenched settler regime was unwilling to surrender power easily. Nationalist attempts to solicit the support of the British government found little sympathy. The British feared black (mis)rule may very well trigger a massive white exodus to Britain, a prospect likely to worsen the economic situation at home. The British government therefore only paid lip service to the nationalist cause.

Indeed nationalist movements of the pre-1964 era failed to fully appreciate the need for full scale armed confrontation with the white regime. While the decision to engage the enemy in violent confrontation had been taken as early as 1960 in the form of acts of sabotage considered relevant to bring forth fear and despondency to the settlers (Bhebe 1999:13), none had so far been taken to that magnitude. This was confirmed by a prominent nationalist, Nathan Shamuyarira when he revealed that 'the decision to start bringing in arms and ammunition, and to send young men away for sabotage training dates from mid 1962, before ZAPU was banned' (Wilkinson 1973:6). There was full talk then of the need to adopt a confrontational stance against the obstinate white regime. The reasoning was that this bellicose rhetoric would frighten the whites out of power. It is worth noting that although nationalists of the time sounded militant in their language, they were nevertheless more concerned with jet-set diplomacy than in preparing for full scale combat.

The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) was formed on the 8th of August 1963 as a breakaway party from ZAPU (Ellert 1993:3). In justifying its split with ZAPU, the ZANU President, Rev Ndabaningi Sithole accused the ZAPU leadership of reluctance to engage the Rhodesian government in physical confrontation (The Rhodesia Herald 10 August 1963). Subsequent to the above, ZANU adopted the policy of militancy and 'confrontation' with the enemy. The militancy was championed by its young cadres who from 1960 had been critical of the pacific approach followed by their leaders. The party contended that its formation heralded a new era of 'take over politics' and of discarding 'constitutionalism and platform politics' (Shamuyarira 1981:79, Sadomba 2011:11). The 1984 ZANU (PF) Congress document reinforced this position when it posited that the formation of ZANU was on the one hand a rejection of the reformist and law abiding politics of past political organisations and on the other an adoption of the politics of radicalism, revolution and armed confrontation (ZANU Committee Report to the Second Congress, August, 1984). Confrontation was to be achieved through the adoption of violence that was justified as a revolutionary weapon as Eddison Zvobgo, a founder member of ZANU argued; 'Colonialism is violence…violence on a people. The only way of meeting violence is by adopting a rigid policy of violence' (ibid). ZANU's slogan of 'confrontation' was adopted by the First ZANU Congress held in Gwelo between the 21st and the 23rd of May, 1964 to specifically distinguish it from ZAPU and other previous African parties that had been perceived to have been non-confrontational ((Tekere 2007:57, Bhebe 1999:13). At this Congress, the party also adopted the slogan: 'we are our own liberators', a slogan that meant that Africans would henceforth take the initiative to liberate themselves (Chidoda 1977:17).

At the Congress, President Sithole had challenged delegates not to call upon others to liberate them: 'If we have no power in our hands to liberate ourselves, then we must disband. We are the people who must die for this country' (The Rhodesian Herald, 22 May 1964). The congress also adopted the 'Five Point Plan' that specified the enemy and spelt out the nature of confrontation. The country's main roads were targeted. Bridges were to be blown up and roadblocks erected to delay or prevent the movement of the army and police. Livestock and crops in European farms were to be destroyed. Telephone wires were to be cut and electricity pylons blown up. Native Commissioners' Offices, Police Stations and white owned shops in African townships were to be attacked. People were to boycott paying dipping fees and poll tax. Further, dip tanks were to be filled up with soil and whites attacked using home-made grenades and petrol bombs (Ellert 1993:7, Tekere 2007:58). Sithole instructed his followers to arm themselves with bows and arrows, axes, home-made knives, spears and such other weapons for physical confrontation with the white regime (Shamuyarira 1981:512, Bhebe 1999:28). All these activities were designed to create an explosive political

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atmosphere best calculated to promote mayhem and frighten whites out of power. In particular, Sithole was anxious to convince his critics that his party meant business.

It was in these circumstances of a charged political climate that the CG was born. The commando group was deployed into the Melsetter district to precisely put into action the Gwelo Congress resolution of confrontation. It became the first commando unit to be deployed into the field (Raeburn 1981:2) and 'the first to strike a blow that kindled the revolutionary fire' (ZANU Central Committee Report, 1984). Their attack targets were calculated to attract quick and wide publicity for the party.

III. Let's Go Home

The CG was hatched in Zambia. Members of the group were all *émigrés* in that country who loathed Rhodesian despotism. The common denominator of all the five members was that they were all disgruntled ZANU youth members resident in Zambia (Ellert 1993:14). They all abhorred the oppression back home which denied them a stake in their country's political cake. At the time of their recruitment, William Ndangana was the Deputy Secretary of ZANU's Youth League in Lusaka. James Dhlamini was employed at the Luxury Tearoom in Kitwe. Victor Mlambo worked in the Zambian mines and was at the same time a member of the Kabushi Branch of ZANU in Ndola while Amos Kademaunga and Master Mazwani were general labourers and also Youth League members of the Masala Branch in Ndola (File 6.4.9F No.10665 [Regina vs. James Dhlamini and Victor Mlambo, High Court, Salisbury, 12.12.64]). Of this group, Ndangana was the oldest, most politicised and most militant. As a young man, he had worked for Rhodesian white farmers in his home district of Chipinge and later in a café in Salisbury and had experienced firsthand, the brutal nature of the settler employer exploitation and white racism (Raeburn 1981:16-18). This had naturally hardened him. Further, he had strong links with ZANU leadership in Zambia and so the party's choice that he leads the group was well calculated.

While (Raeburn 1981:8) avers that all the members of the group came from Chipinge and that 'it was inevitable that they should become friends in a foreign country' (Zambia), Ndangana refutes this explanation by clarifying that it was only himself and Victor Mlambo who came from Chipinge. James Dhlamini's parents originally came from Matebeleland, Master Mazwani came from Mashonaland East while Amos Kademaunga's family lived in Malawi (Ndangana 1985). Further, members of the group only came to know each other just a few days before their deployment. The composition of the group was therefore deliberately calculated to reflect national representation.

On the other hand the random selection of members of this group was a disadvantage as they were basically strangers to one another and so treated each other with suspicion. Besides, they were simply thrown into the field with no training in sabotage. It is worth noting that right up to the time of their first sabotage activity in the country, it was only Ndangana who knew how to make a petrol bomb (Ndangana 1985). The leadership's omission of the need for proper training was indeed a fundamental weakness which was to reflect in the battle field. The youthful nature of the group and political immaturity of the combatants was another disadvantage. Master Mazwani was only 17 years old and so probably too young to fully appreciate the intricacies involved in fighting the white regime (Raeburn 1981:6). Their inspiration though was the justice of their cause.

Members of the group left Kitwe for Rhodesia at the end of May 1964. They entered the country through the Chirundu border post declaring they were returning residents (Ellert 1993:10). On arrival in Salisbury, they were briefed on their assignment by the party's Secretary General (Robert Mugabe) and Secretary for Defence (Noel Mukono). Some hasty preparatory work of identifying targets for attack had been done in the Nyanyadzi area of Melsetter where they were to be received and assisted by local elders *baba* Gwinya (ZANU Chairman for Melsetter District), Obert Mutezo (Treasurer) and Robert Mukome, a local businessman. Such preparations, while surreptitiously done had however been inadequate. Indeed Obed Mutezo was to later reveal that preparatory survey work had only taken a week and a half (Obed Mutezo 1985). [ii] The contribution rendered by the above elders marked the genesis of civilian participation in the struggle. This was to be solidified in the latter part of the struggle.

The Melsetter area of Manicaland was considered strategic for various reasons. Several senior ZANU politicians such as Ndabaningi Sithole and Herbert Chitepo hailed from Manicaland. Chief Rekayi Tangwena, who became a symbol of traditional African opposition to colonial rule in the 1960s and 1970s when he openly opposed the Rhodesian land tenure system also came from Manicaland (Sadomba 2011:24). Further, various Ndau chiefs from Chipinge had vehemently opposed the Native Husbandry Act which they regarded as a fundamental onslaught on their livelihood since it limited the number of acres and cattle each family could own (Raeburn 1981:8). Chiefs Gwenzi, Mutema and Mapungwana had openly defied cattle dipping and destocking (ibid). On the surface, the area therefore appeared to provide firm grass root support for such an operation. Local contact elders were indeed fully involved in local and national politics. The same elders had been summoned and quizzed over the Five Point Plan at the local police station just after the Gwelo Congress (Obed Mutezo 1985).

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Further, the area had also witnessed an exceptional hive of political activities prior to the operation that amounted to over a dozen (Sadomba 2011:24), File 6.4.9F No.10665). Yoshikuni (2006) proffers that Manicaland had witnessed the formation of Manicaland-aligned urban associations in cities like Salisbury as far back as the 1920s. These had nurtured a group of highly conscious political cadres from this part of the country. Sadomba (2011:25) further posits that Manicaland, like Victoria Province, had a high rate of literacy due to strong missionary investment in education and so perceived to be in a position to easily grasp political issues. The mountainous and heavily wooded terrain of the area was ideal for hit and run operations (Raeburn 1981:5). It is however pertinent to state that political upheaval of similar nature was not solely confined to Manicaland as sabotage activities, co-ordinated from the office of the Secretary for Defence, were taking place in other parts of the country (Noel Mukono 1985).

The group left Salisbury on the 30th of June and upon arrival in Umtali were received by Joseph Shasha, a local youth leader. They purchased long knives and dynamites for use in the field. It turned out that the party had no firearms at that time for the combatants who had to use rudimentary weapons. The nature of their arms revealed a fundamental weakness on the part of the organisers who believed that mere sabotage activities with rudimentary weapons would scare the Smith regime into surrender. Such views were indeed myopic and short-sighted as the entrenched regime was not prepared to relinquish power that easily.

Shasha took them to Nyanyadzi and delivered them to their contacts. Their arrival was timed to coincide with Sithole's visit in the area, a move calculated to boost their activities (Ellert 1993:9). They spent their first night in a booked room at Mugoba's Eating House. That very night, they walked about the township and drank some beer with locals, a risky move given the task they were to undertake (Mutezo 1985). This again was a sign of lack of training.

The group was taken to their hideout cave about five kilometres from the township in the dark hours of the following morning. It was ideally located next to a spring where members could fetch water. Their contacts supplied them with basics such as food and medication. In this, the locals were making their small contribution to the struggle.

Their first operation was conducted in the evening of the 1st of July, which day the party had declared the 'National Day of Action'. The group spent the day preparing petrol bombs with each making two. Several confrontation notes were written by Ndangana. These were to be left at every operation scene to announce the presence of the group in the area. That very night, the group adopted the name 'Crocodile Gang'. It came from the nature of the crocodile: when it catches its prey, it never lets go (Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Z.B.C) Documentary, 'The Crocodile Group Operation', 30.07.85).

IV. Nyanyadzi Police Camp Attack

The target of the 1st of July was the Nyanyadzi Police Station that was located by the Nyanyadzi River near the township. The station was a notorious centre of interrogations of suspected African nationalists. Many had been detained at the centre for long periods without being charged. During the time of the CG operation, there was a large contingent of 1500 soldiers and policemen in the Melsetter-Chipinge area. These were supported by 12 helicopters, 3 spotter planes and the camp had a new Member-In-Charge appointed in June 1964, Sergeant Judin (Raeburn 1981:11). He was heard declaring that he had come to Nyanyadzi to wipe out African nationalists altogether (Sithole 1970:144, Ellert 1993:10).

Indeed the man was faithful to his 'calling' as hundreds of political activists were tortured on the dry river bed by the big *mucha* tree approximately fifty metres from the camp. The place was called the 'çhurch' because it was meant to be a place of 'political confessions'. Various techniques were employed to force confessions. Prisoners were denied food, kept in the open fence for days on end and denied visitors. 'Un-cooperative' suspects were brutally assaulted. When the African Member of Parliament for the area, Mr. Mkudu visited the area just around the time of the CG operation, he was greeted by shouts for help from the prisoners who pleaded with him to appeal to the Member-In-Charge to give them food and stop assaulting them (Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly Debates, Volume 39, October 1964, col. 102-9). The MP saw traumatised detainees with swollen wrists. It was evident that the camp had become a symbol of white oppression in the area, inspiring fear in all nationalists and subsequently generating unprecedented anger from them.

The CG had been appraised of these brutalities by their contacts and hence the reason why the police camp became their first target. Obed Mutezo, one of the contacts had himself been a victim of the camp assaults as he had been picked for interrogation and torture by Sergeant Judin soon after his return from the Gwelo Congress. He, like many others detested the camp and so wanted it destroyed.

The attack took place during the cover of darkness around 10.00 p.m. A reconnaissance of the camp had been conducted during the afternoon of that day by Ndangana and a local elder, Solomon Gwitira. They had initially identified a helicopter at the camp for attack with home-made petrol bombs. When Ndangana and his team came near to where the helicopter had been parked in the afternoon, they discovered that it was no longer there and hastily decided to instead

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attack the house of the notorious Member-In-Charge. The attack was planned to run simultaneously with that of elders Gwitira and Amos Rwizi (Gwitira 1985). The CG went into a single file-Ndangana, Dhlamini, Mazwani, Mlambo and then Kademaunga. Kademaunga broke line with others as he was already growing timid. He was spotted by an African constable on patrol, Chinembiri and he rose and started running. Chinembiri lit his torch and barked *'hini ndava'* (what's wrong)? Ndangana threw his bomb at the constable but missed him. The rest of the crew members, who were by then dead scared, rose and took to their heels. Chinembiri fled in the opposite direction blowing a warning whistle. A tracer bomb was thrown into the sky by the police and lit the whole area. Gwitira and Rwizi were forced to abandon their complementary attack plan and together with the CG retreated. Back at their base, Kademaunga was given a stern warning for disrupting their plan. Meanwhile at the police station, Ndangana had left one of the confrontation notes under a stone to announce that they were not criminals but political activists.

The attack had shaken the police for on the 2nd of July, they were on the rampage arresting party activists in the area. One may be persuaded to conclude that the attack was a failure since nobody was injured and there was no damage to property. On the contrary, it was a rude awakening to the police and the regime as they for the first time came face to face with ZANU political confrontation. The note left at the police station confirmed this.

V. The Chikwizi Bridge Attack

Their next assignment was the erection of a makeshift roadblock on the Chikwizi River on the night of the 2nd of July around 8 p.m. The bridge was located 10 kilometres south of Nyanyadzi Police Station towards Birchenough Bridge. Bridges were ideal attack targets as they were easy to barricade. For the night's assignment, each member was armed with a knife and stones and instructed by Ndangana to kill any white person who passed by the bridge (File 6.4.9F No.10665).

Kademaunga had shown signs of timidity following the previous day's experiences and had told Ndangana that he was opting out. He was subsequently threatened with possible execution as his withdrawal would expose the rest of the group (Raeburn 1981:7). Meanwhile, Ndangana withdrew the fighting knife from Kademaunga because he no longer trusted him. What was coming out was that young Kademaunga had underestimated the hardships and field risks. Indeed signs of lack of proper military training were beginning to surface. They had just conducted one operation and one of them was already backsliding.

They were immediately confronted by two problems. The first was that since this bridge was in a Tribal Trust Land (TTL), most of the cars passing by were most likely those of blacks. The second was that this road was normally not very busy during the night. On this very night, they were however fortunate in that after waiting just for a short while, a car approached from the direction of Birchenough Bridge. It was a Vauxhall Velose that belonged to an African, Lucas Siyomo who was driving with his family from Fort Victoria to Umtali (File 6.4.9F No.10665). Siyomo stopped a few metres from the boulders. His first impression was that the bridge was under construction but as he opened his door, he was greeted by showers of stones. His windscreen was smashed and when he realised this was a political attack, he pleaded with his attackers, 'I am one of you, I am one of you, leave me alone, sons of the soil' (Raeburn 1981:5). Ndangana ordered his fighters to immediately stop attacking and rebuked him for travelling at night on 'National Action Day'. He was however allowed to proceed after being warned against reporting to the police. Although Siyomo may not have been aware of the prohibition of night travelling, at least he was aware of ZANU's programme of confrontation as he had pleaded to be saved from the attack because 'I am one of you'. It was therefore evident that the message of confrontation had indeed spread far and wide.

Following this attack, Ndangana commanded that they hide for some time to allow the dust to settle. Meanwhile two confrontation notes were placed under a stone on the bridge. These read:

'CROCODILE GROUP WARNS IAN SMITH THEY WORK ON CONFRONTATION'

'IAN SMITH BEWARE. CROCODILE GROUP ON CONFRONTATION. POLITICAL. WHITE MAN IS DEVIL.' (File 6.4.9F No.10665).

Ndangana was however worried by Kademaunga's non-participation in the attack of Siyomo. Further, Siyomo reported the incident at Nyanyadzi Police Station and Judin swung into action by immediately deploying a police car to the scene. On seeing the approaching police car, they quickly removed the boulders from the bridge and took cover. The police van passed through the bridge, quickly turned back only to find the boulders back on the bridge. The police fired a verey pistol that lit the whole area. Kademaunga rose and ran for dear life and that was the last time they were to see him. What was clear was that henceforth this young man posed as a security threat. However the police did not see the rest of the members because of the thick shrubs. Indeed the vegetation of the area had played a key role in protecting them. They had to immediately move to Biriwiri in the same district. The police meanwhile realised that they were confronted with a political challenge as revealed by the two notes of confrontation.

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VI. The Killing of Oberholtzer

The aftermath of the Chikwizi Bridge attack witnessed massive arrests of over 500 people (Raeburn 1981:10). Among those arrested were Obed Mutezo, *'baba'* Gwinya and Robert Mukome who were accused of masterminding the latest political activities in the area. Their arrest further put the CG under danger as the fear was that they would crack under duress and expose.

In Biriwiri, they were forced to operate without contacts and local assistance. They found themselves exposed, another clear sign of the lack of planning on the part of the leadership. Their only asset though was their single guide who knew the area well. During the two days-3 and 4 July, they conducted some reconnaissance of possible targets and on 4 July decided to mount another roadblock on the main road from Umtali to Melsetter, a few kilometres from the Skyline Junction. This was a rich white farming area and so ideal for their latest operation. July 4 was a Saturday and most of the cars travelling along this road usually belonged to whites returning from shopping in Umtali. Chances of escape appeared high as the area was endowed with thick vegetation. The adjacent African Muushu Purchase Area would provide them with cover during their retreat. Again this was just an assumption as the people of the area were not even aware of the presence of the fighters.

The group went to their place of operation early as they wanted to get it right this time around by targeting whites only. It would then be possible, before dark to tell whether the occupants of cars arriving were white or black. They started putting up their makeshift roadblock around 6.00 p. m. Big boulders were piled from one ditch to the other and created a barrier thick enough to block a car from passing through. Ndangana again posted two confrontation notes under a nearby stone. The notes read:

'CONFRONTATION. SMITH BASOP, CROCODILE GANG WILL SOON KILL ALL WHITES. R.I. HOKOYO'.

'CROCODILE GROUP ON ACTION. WE SHALL KILL ALL WHITES IF THEY DON'T WANT TO GIVE BACK OUR COUNTRY. CONFRONTATION.' (File 6.4.9F No.10665).

They hid nearby, each with two petrol bombs and a pile of stones. The bombs had been 'checked and double-checked to make sure they wouldn't let them down' this time around (Raeburn 1981:11).

At about 6.30 p.m., a Volkswagon Kombi approached from the direction of Umtali. It stopped a few metres from the boulders and a huge white man dressed in khaki shorts disembarked. He was Pieter Johannes Andries Oberholtzer who was coming from shopping trip in Umtali and heading for Chipinge with his wife and a three year old daughter. In Chipinge he worked as a shift man at Silver Streams Wattle Factory (Raeburn 1981:14). At his workplace, the 45 year old Afrikaner knew how to deal with Africans- 'to show a strong hand, take no nonsense, keep them in their place; in short, show them who was boss' (ibid).

It was convenient that the man who drove into their roadblock was a symbol of white oppression as he was also a branch chairman of the Rhodesia Front party in the Chipinge area, a party which was an epitome of white oppression (Martin and Johnson 1981:10). Further, as an Afrikaner, Oberholtzer belonged to a species of ultra-racial whites who had migrated from South Africa at the beginning of colonial occupation. Like their South African counterparts, they continued to be guided by extreme racism that viewed Africans as a species that was 'born to hew wood and carry water and nothing more' (ibid). Such was the man who arrogantly stepped out of this kombi to meet his fate at the hands of the CG.

As he disembarked from his car, he picked a stone, hurled it into the dark sky cursing. Meanwhile members of the CG tactically left their hiding places and advanced towards the white man. When he saw them, he barked angrily: *'Yini ndava yovala mugwagwa-Kafuri*?' (Why are you blocking the road-*Kaffirs*?) [iii] (Z.B.C.Documentary 'The Crocodile Group Operation', 30.07.85). The insult infuriated members of the Gang who sprung into action by flinging stones at his car breaking a side window. Incensed by the attack, Oberholtzer went back into his car, pulled out a pistol and advanced shouting *'bobbejaans'* (baboons) [iv] and threatening to kill the 'bloody *kaffirs'* (Raeburn 1981:15). Ndangana gallantly advanced towards the white man, quickly pulled out his combat knife and stabbed him and Oberholtzer fell on his car.

When Oberholtzer's wife realised that her husband had been stabbed, she screamed in terror, disembarked from the car and assisted him get into car and drive through the barrier. Oberholtzer fired the car over the barrier and a few metres down, lost control as he tried to negotiate a curve and overturned landing in a ditch. Ndangana and his colleagues followed to finish him off. Under further attack, Oberholtzer gathered courage and tried to fight back but was overwhelmed by Ndangana who again stabbed him on the throat. The white man fell and died. Attempts to burn the blood-soaked body failed. They quickly disappeared into the nearby thick bush thus marking the beginning of a long and hazardous retreat. The wife and the kid were spared from attack as the CG did not want to give the impression that it was a criminal group. The killing of a symbol of oppression was enough to send the message of confrontation across. The wife and kid were rescued by the Martindale family who drove them to Chipinge where they reported the incident to the police. The following day newspapers were awash with news of the death of Oberholtzer. Giving evidence in the High Court at the trial of Victor Mlambo and James Dhamini for the

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'murder' of her husband, Johanna Oberholtzer explicitly described what happened on the day in question:

> *As he stopped, he got out and they threw stones at him. I can remember seeing four Africans around the car. They came up to him and I saw one raise a knife above his head and stab down at my husband. It was so quick and all in such a rush that I did not see how many times he stabbed him. It was quite a long knife. Stones were coming from all around. I could not see well. They broke the windscreen with stones. I got a stone on my jaw. (File 6.4.9 F No. 10665).*

VII. Escape and Aftermath

The CG was forced to hastily retreat under very difficult conditions of limited food supplies and without a guide. They received hostile reception wherever they sought assistance for fear of reprisals from the regime. They were labelled a 'gang' of criminals and murderers. Murder was not appreciated as a justifiable political weapon. Again this reflected on the poor preparation by the leadership to ensure total reception of these fighters by the locals.

After the killing of Oberholtzer, the CG went back to Nyanyadzi, were given money by *'mai'* Kombo for foodstuffs and herded south towards the Middle Sabi. They walked non-stop for two days and slept under bridges at night because they were afraid of approaching villagers for assistance. They headed towards Ndangana's old school, Chikore Mission where they hoped to get assistance but again they hit a brick wall. For strategic reasons, the team then decided to break into two around the 14th/15th of July. Mlambo and Dhlamini headed for the Mozambican border while Ndangana and Mazwani headed for Salisbury where they were received by Ndabaningi Sithole's wife and given money to find their way to Zambia. They were eventually smuggled into Zambia by a Glens Haulage transporter during the first days of August 1964.

Ndangana joined other cadres who were going to China for military training while Mazwani initially opted for a civilian life. Ndangana received his first military training in China and was upon completion deployed to Intumbi Reefs Camp in Tanzania to serve as a ZANLA instructor (Ellert 1993:11). He remained a military operative throughout the armed struggle, holding various posts, including that of Chief of Operations. At independence, he was appointed Deputy Minister of Defence (Para-Military) and also served as a Senator. He died in a horrific car accident on 27 June 1989 (Sunday Reporter 2012). For his contribution to the struggle, he was subsequently honoured by the government by being accorded a state funeral at the National Heroes Acre. Little has since been said about in terms of celebrating his contribution.

Master Mazwani later decided to also go for military training, was deployed into Rhodesia in 1965 and arrested by the Rhodesian security forces that very year. He was tried for 'terrorism' but because he was below twenty years, saved from the gallows by being imprisoned for twenty years. He is thought to have been released at independence in 1980 and is believed to have suffered from mental ailment thereafter (Ndangana 1985). Again there was clear state neglect. He should have been re-habilitated given his contribution to the genesis of the Second Chimurenga. Indeed he should have also benefitted from the package extended to other war veterans of the Second Chimurenga.

Meanwhile, Mlambo and Dhlamini escaped into Mozambique and stayed with an uncle called Watch for a week before being apprehended on the 22nd of July 1964 by constable Naish and sergeant Tapira during a raid on the kraal of Mlambo's uncle (Ellert 1993:10). The two were tried in the Rhodesian High Court and on 14 December 1964 convicted under the notorious Law and Order Maintenance Act for 'contravening paragraph (a) of subsection (i) of section 37 of the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act (Chapter 39) alternatively, murder of Petrus Jonannes Andries Oberholtzer' and were sentenced to death under the mandatory 'hanging clause' of the act (File 6.4.9F No.10665).

The case took on the overtone of an international 'cause celebre' (Scully 1984:35). An appeal was lodged by the Queen against the death sentence but was rejected by the Rhodesian government on the argument that it could not release 'cold-blooded murderers'. The case dragged on to 1 March 1968 when the appeal was finally thrown out by the Appellant Division of the Supreme Court. The Queen exercised her royal prerogative by reprieving the two and commuting their sentences to life imprisonment. Rhodesian whites were highly incensed by the Queen's action which they argued undermined law and order in the country (Scully 1984:35). The two men were however subsequently hanged at Salisbury Central Prison on 6 March 1968 (Raeburn 1981:22, Ellert 1993:10, Whyte 1990:136). Again the Zimbabwean government failed to post-humously honour these gallant sons of the struggle. Statues could have been erected in independent Zimbabwe to celebrate their exploits. Indeed Zimbabwean historiography is lean on the contribution of these 'sons of the soil' to the struggle history and there is deafening silence on their contribution even at the annual Heroes Days commemorations.

Amos Kademaunga who left the group after the Chikwizi Bridge incident was arrested by the police in Umtali on the 5th of July, tried and sentenced to ten years imprisonment with hard labour for erecting illegal roadblocks and petrol bombing offices. At independence he was believed to be alive somewhere in the country. What is disheartening is that the Zimbabwean struggle historiography has again

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remained 'mum' on the contribution of all these icons to the liberation of the country. Save for Ndangana who was accorded a heroes status at his death, the other gallant operatives of this group have remained forgotten heroes of the struggle. That recognition has not been given either to the civilians who played host to the CG. The marginalisation of these struggle icons remain a bone of contention in Zimbabwe's struggle history.

The killing of Oberholtzer sent panic waves to the regime as the army and police was unleashed on the people of the area. The government became more vicious as it embarked on a massive clampdown campaign on all suspected nationalists and sympathisers. At Nyanyadzi, *'baba'* Gwinya, Solomon Gwitira, Obed Mutezo and a number of other local elders were arrested and detained at the notorious camp and tortured at the infamous 'church' for assisting the CG. Mutezo and Gwitira were jointly charged with murder but later acquitted in the Umtali Magistrate Court for lack of evidence. At the same time hundreds more were also arrested throughout Chipinge district. Tekere, the National Deputy Secretary for Youth was also arrested and detained at Nyanyadzi Police Station on suspicion that he was a member of the CG. He was charged for the murder of Oberholtzer and later released after the government failed to build a case against him (Tekere 2007:58).

On 26 August 1964 the government declared a State of Emergency which allowed it to ban ZANU and the PCC. Confirming the banning of ZANU in the House of Assembly on the 3rd of September 1964, the Minister of Law and Order declared that ZANU had conducted a number of 'subversive' activities in the Melsetter district and particularly singled out the 1 July attack of the Nyanyadzi Police Camp 'following which a series of unlawful incidents took place in the surrounding districts and these culminated in the vicious murder of a European motorist at a roadblock in the Melsetter area on the 4th of July 1964' (Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly Debates, 3 September, 1964. p. 1760). Similar activities, engineered by ZANU and the PCC were also taking place in other parts of the country. Party leaders were arrested and detained at Sikombela and Gonakudzingwa (Ellert 1993, 3). Those who could, like Herbert Chitepo and James Chikerema fled into exile. The only African mouthpiece, the Daily News was also banned. The political gridlock culminated in the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by Smith on 11 November, 1965 (Ellert 1993:4). The heated political climate so created set the stage for full scale confrontation-which came in the form of an armed struggle that followed.

VIII. The Place of the Crocodile Gang in Zimbabwe's Historiography

The death of Oberholtzer marked the beginning of a protracted armed struggle. His killing amounted to an open declaration of war by ZANU on the white regime. The Rhodesian government was stunned by this horrific act and vowed to revenge by building up more stores of arms and intensifying its clamp-down on nationalist political activities.

On the other hand, the action of the CG demonstrated to many youngsters that someone with courage and determination could fight even without a gun. To many black youngsters, the killing of Oberholtzer destroyed the myth of the invincibility of whites. The African image of himself and what he was capable of doing was greatly enhanced by the courageous exploits of the CG and as the 1984 Second ZANU Congress was to aptly observe, "the killing cured Zimbabweans of colonial neurosis which had historically relegated the black man to an inferior position in the settler scheme of things" (ZANU Central Committee Report, 1984). The killing removed fear of the white men among blacks. Further, the morale of the party was boosted by this act. From then on ZANU was prepared to take the long road to independence through armed confrontation.

The party also learnt a number of lessons from their deployment of the CG. They had not fully prepared the area to receive the combatants. This was especially shown during the retreat of the group when they were received with hostility by the people they were fighting for. Moreover the youngsters had not been initiated adequately into sabotage activities and so vulnerable right from the beginning. The party had acted rather hastily to meet short-term political gains. This approach was guided the tendency then among Rhodesian liberation movements that what was needed to displace white rule was to conduct just a few sabotage activities which would ignite civil disobedience among blacks against the government. This would in turn frighten the whites into relinquishing power. Indeed this was too simple a hypothesis for which the nationalists got a rude shock on the ground. It was evident that the party had not moved much from its pre-1964 tactics except for the adoption of the revolutionary slogan of confrontation. The party learnt that there was need for better planning and the need to send the youngsters for proper military training. The party subsequently initiated programmes of sending youngsters to friendly countries for proper military training.

The activities of the CG inaugurated the armed struggle for independence in the latter part of the 1960s. The killing of Oberholtzer was a clear demonstration to the whites that blacks no longer considered themselves as mere punch bags. Indeed the activities of the CG were recognised as the first step towards organised insurgency. The adoption of confrontation slogan and the subsequent deployment of the CG was a step in the right direction- the clear message being that the enemy had to be taken head on.

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The hanging of Dhamini and Mlambo were clear setbacks to the struggle but in a way served as an inspiration and a political booster to the party. The two were revered, but not fully, as early martyrs and heroes of the Second Chimurenga. Their activities and subsequent execution helped advertise the party internationally. Other youngsters such as Emerson Mnangagwa were inspired to follow suit when in 1965 his group blew up a goods train along the Fort Victoria-Chikwalacuala railway line (Z.B.C.-T.V. Documentary, 10.05.85).

Several other trained groups were to be deployed for action (Ellert 1993:11-13). One such group of five under Chigwada was assigned to blow up the Feruka oil refinery and oil pipeline from Beira. The second group of six under Mudukuti was assigned to conduct sabotage activities in the Fort Victoria area while the third group of four under Mizha operated in the Zvimba TTL and Zowa Purchase areas. This group also killed a white farmer, J.H. Viljoen and his wife at their Nevada farm in the Hartley (Chegutu) area on 16 May, 1966 (Bhebe 1999:131). The forth group of seven engaged the enemy in a full day battle at Sinoia (Chinhoyi) on the 29th of April 1966. All cadres in this group were killed but their battle has been highly celebrated in Zimbabwe.

IX. Conclusion

This article has exposed the little known history of the CG. It has made an attempt to situate it in its proper historical place. It has acknowledged the group's contribution to the execution of the Second Chimurenga. It has enumerated the various exploits it conducted under difficult conditions, the initial support provided to the struggle by the selected civilian population and the brutal response of the Rhodesian regime. It has further exposed the weaknesses of early planning by nationalist leaders and exposed the lessons learnt by the latter planners. The article has highlighted the significance of the group's operations to the entire struggle history. It has further raised the academic concern of the marginalisation of the CG and failure to recognise and celebrate the achievements of the group in Zimbabwe's historiography.

X. Notes on Contributor

Baxter Tavuyanago (MA) is a Lecturer in History at Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe. He is currently pursuing PhD Studies in History with the University of Pretoria. His researches have been published among others, in *Journal of Pan African Studies* (2008), *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* (2010, 2011), *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* (2011), *European Journal of Sustainable Development* (2012), *Journal of Southern African Studies* (2012), *International Journal of Developing Societies* (2012) and *Leipzig VDM Verlag Dr Muller* (2011). He has also co-authored two high school History texts for Zimbabwean students-*Total History* (2009, 2010). His areas of research interest are war, culture, human rights and development.

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XII. Interviews

1. Interview with *baba* Gwinya (Chairman of the Melsetter ZANU District in 1964), Nyanyadzi, Chimanimani, 09.03.85.
2. Interview with David Mugido (local elder), Rufaro Business Centre, Nyanyadzi, 28.05.85.
3. Interview with Noel Mukono (ZANU Secretary for Defence in 1964), ZANU Office, Harare, 24.07.85.
4. Interview with Nobert Makotsi (local elder and 'church' victim), Nenhowe Business Centre, Nyanyadzi, 10.03.85.
5. Interview with Obed Mutezo (Treasurer of ZANU Melsetter District in 1964), Rufaro Business Centre, Nyanyadzi, 09.03.85.
6. Interview with Solomon Gwitira ((local elder and 'church' victim), Nenhowe Business Centre, Nyanyadzi, 10.03.85).
7. Interview with William Ndangana, Milton Building, Harare, 09.01.85.

Notes

[i] The group adopted this name in 1964 at the beginning of their operations. While the use of 'gang' may imply criminality, the name will be used throughout this write up since it was the one the group called itself.

[ii] Interviews conducted with local elders revealed that the local population was not aware of the presence of the group in their area which was kept a secret by the leadership. This explains why during their escape, the group faced insurmountable difficulties as they were treated as criminals and not freedom fighters.

[iii] The term *kaffir* was a derogatory term used on Africans by most white settlers. Again it had its origins in South Africa and was greatly detested by blacks.

[iv] Another derogatory term in common use on blacks at the time.

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