

Hallo Mac,

I have finished reading your thesis on the Cassinga raid, and have after some very serious soul searching, decided that, as a participant in the Cassinga raid, I have an obligation, not only to the other participants, but also to all fellow SA Paratroopers, to comment.

Firstly, let me congratulate you on what appears to be a very thorough research regarding all the aspects of the raid. That it will generate serious debates, difference of opinions and perhaps even total rejection is to be expected. Such is the nature of any published research article. I say appears as I have not, and have no intention to, verify the accuracy and correctness of all your sources of information. Whether it would be possible to gain access to all the Classified Documents (if they still exist) is another matter. By the way, if I could have a copy of the personal "Debriefing Reports" for D- coy, it would be highly appreciated. I also have in my possession my original handwritten orders that I prepared for the attack, and you are welcome to have a copy.

Regarding the accuracy of the information I have provided, I wish to confirm that you have given an accurate account of the information I have provided you with, regarding the actions of the group I commanded (D coy). Regarding the apparent confusion that exists, concerning the exact number of AA guns at Cassinga, the following: (*Refer page 134, footnote 614 of your thesis*).

During D coy's attack on the main trench system, we did encounter 3 AA guns as stated in my debriefing report. I confirm that in my "Cassinga Notas" I refer to only 1 gun. The reason for this is that the foremost AA gun (the gun nearest to us during the attack) was in action at the time when Rifleman JC de Waal was killed next to me. After the fighting at the trenches were over and I walked through the area assaulted by D coy, did I come upon the other two guns located in very close proximity to the one I refer to in my notes. Therefore my reference to only one AA gun. Check the debriefing report of Brig Hannes Botha as he walked through the assault area with me, shortly after.

Regarding the rest of your thesis, the following:

➤ **Confusion regarding who was in command of the ground forces.**

I wish to confirm that at no time before or during the raid did Brig Du Plessis future in any way in any of the Order Groups attended by me. I do not recall him addressing the Assault Group Commanders. Col Breytenbach, however, was present at Order Groups and did address the Assault Group Commanders. During the battle, whilst I was being briefed by Col Breytenbach regarding the attack on the AA position, Brig Du Plessis joined us. From our brief encounter, it was obvious to me that Col Breytenbach was in command, as he was conferring with other members of the Command Group. (I can recall Cmdt Lew Gerber and Maj Blikkies Blignaut being present). He was also conferring by radio with the other Coy-commanders. I experienced Brig Du Plessis as an observer as he, at no time

whilst I was present, albeit for a few minutes, gave instructions, guidance or interfered/interrupted with the actions of Col Breytenbach.

➤ **Breakdown of command and control, discipline of troops during the extraction phase.** (pages 146, 148 footnotes 707, 708, 709 of your thesis).

As I was evacuated to the heli-admin area, within minutes after having taken the AA gun position, I am not in a position to give any meaningful input as to what happened or did not happen, during the extraction of the main force. What I can share with you, is that Maj Blikkies Blignaut (he was co-ordinating our specific extraction) was very calm and I did not sense any degree of panic from either him, or the troops which were being evacuated at the same time as myself. Regarding the statement that the troops were unfit, the following. I have always regarded myself as being very fit (I have regularly run and completed the Comrades Marathon), but let me tell you, when the fighting was over I was completely exhausted. It is easy for people, who have not personally experienced the absolute exhaustive nature of a fire fight to make such a wide sweeping statement. That not everybody was on the same level of fitness, is to be expected, but to generalize, based on one paratrooper apparently collapsing from exhaustion (page 148 of your thesis) is unacceptable.

It would be interesting to hear the comments of the various commanders (Monty Brett, Lew Gerber, Hugo Murray, Gerrie Steyn, Pierre Hough). I find it hard to believe that these people would allow such a breakdown of discipline as is evident from your thesis.

➤ **Was Cassinga a legitimate military target.**

This, as well as the claimed massacre of civilians, is the biggest problem I have with your thesis.

I would firstly refer to page 157 of your thesis and I quote: "It must not be forgotten though, that in terms of the guerilla doctrine followed by SWAPO at the time, no base would be a purely military base". This statement clearly indicates that it was SWAPO practice to use the presence of civilians as a smoke screen behind which they hid guerilla activities.

Given that this then is an acknowledged guerilla tactic, can any of the critics, tell me at what point such a base does become a legitimate target?

On page 155 you quote SWAPO's acknowledgement that there were 300 soldiers in Cassinga at the time of the attack. (Thus, given the evident lack of credibility regarding SWAPO's evidence as becomes evident from your thesis, it is possible that there were more than 300 soldiers.) 300 soldiers, a very extensive trench system with AA guns to protect "refugees"? Come on!

In your thesis you have pointed out so many discrepancies in the SWAPO testimonies, reports and accounts, that I actually stopped counting. This very obvious lack of credibility regarding SWAPO as well as civilian survivors of the attack, statements and claims, stands in stark contrast to the factual and verifiable testimonies, statements and documentary evidence as presented by the SA Defence Force, actual participants of the raid, as well as the SA Government. From this, it is safe to say, that the only explanation for this, is that SWAPO could not afford to present the truth for fear of being caught out regarding their claim that Cassinga was a refugee camp. On page 177 and 178 of your thesis, you clearly confirm that as a result of the SA Raid, SWAPO's operational capacity was blunted. How in heaven's name, can an attack on an installation which mainly host refugees/civilians "blunt operational capacity"?

On page 177 you also quote a source (Senior member of PLAN) that confirms that Dino Hamambo was at Cassinga during the time of the attack, to "co-ordinate and select those who wanted to undergo military training". Selection for military training in a "refugee camp"? And it is not considered to be a legitimate military target? Please! Maybe the informed can also enlighten me, as to how one tells the difference between a civilian and a "guerilla" which is dressed in civilians?

I have done some serious soul searching and have replayed the attack in my mind over and over, to see if I can find anything to convince me that the base was anything but a legitimate military target, and I can not! The same applies to the death of Kokkie de Waal, next to me. He was most definitely shot in the chest. After the attack was over, I found people armed with military weapons, but did not find any evidence of knitting needles or other civilian type weapons which might have caused his death.

➤ **The claimed massacre of civilians.**

On page 186 of your thesis you state: "The massacre of civilians was most certainly an aspect that should also be seen as a "failure" in the operation". This statement is unforgivable, as it would indicate that it is your opinion that your fellow paratroopers, wantonly slain and continued to slay civilians throughout the operation. Not being English, so as to ensure that I fully understand the word "massacre", I looked up the definition. All the definitions I found explains massacre as: "the act of killing a large numbers of humans indiscriminately and cruelly" or "the wanton killing of many people".

Throughout your thesis, you, quite correctly, never hesitated to aggressively criticize different aspects of the operation. But not once have you criticized SWAPO for endangering the lives of "refugees" and "civilians" by housing them in a military camp. Why not? This total lack of criticism and lack of condemnation of SWAPO would imply that either you condone the use of civilians as human shields by terrorists, or that the practice to combine terrorist

camps with refugee camps, has become a practice which is totally acceptable in terms of International Law (which to my information it is not).

The assault force consisted mainly out of Citizen Force Soldiers, whom you really put a knife into. They consisted of English as well as Afrikaans speaking members. They all belonged to different political parties. In Civilian life, many of them held senior and management positions. How is it possible that, assuming that people were massacred, not one of them reported this “wanton killing of humans”? There is no way that such a massacre could have been held secret from the public by the SA Defence Force/Government, as it was members of all walks of public life, that participated in the attack. Within 3 days after the attack, we were back in civilian life. There was no effort, by any person or organization to prevent us from sharing the facts of the attack with others. How is it possible that nobody ran to the Press or the Opposition in Parliament? Think how easy it would have been to topple the then Government. If Vorster could not survive the Info Scandal, how would he, or the S A Government, have survived the consequences of such a massacre? Cmdt Monty Brett and Lew Gerber are English and were most definitely not National Party supporters. To imply that they through their silence deliberately hid the alleged “massacre” from the public is an insult to their personal integrity and their integrity as professional soldiers. In my experience they have never hesitated to take on senior Permanent Force Officers if they were in disagreement. Why would they now not speak up?

That civilians were killed during the attack has never been denied by any of the participants. For you, or any other person, to state or create the impression that the paratroopers deliberately and wantonly killed civilians, is malicious by intend and unforgivable.

If blame must allocated for the killing of civilians, then most certainly such blame must be for SWAPO. Why did they house large numbers of “civilians” in a military camp? On page 116, footnote 489, your evidence proofs that SWAPO was expecting an attack and therefore re-located some of the civilians. If this is true, why did they not relocate all the civilians? Why did they not approach the United Nations or the International Press for assisting in the prevention of the attack? Instead, according to your research, they frantically further developed the trench system of the camp (*page 116 footnote 489 of your thesis*). It obviously suited SWAPO to keep as many civilians as possible in the camp as human shields. The fact that they did not try to prevent the attack, or to relocate all the civilians, would most definitely suggest that they deliberately ignored the safety of the civilians. The only “indiscriminate” killing that took place was as a result of the fragmentation bombs dropped by the Air Force. What alternative bombing or softening of the target, given that there were no “Smart” bombs available at the time, could have been used?

In conclusion, my disappointment stems from the fact that, in spite of all the evidence as contained in your thesis, you in my opinion, chose not to make any deductions or statements that would result in putting the blame for the killing of civilians were it

belongs – SWAPO! You leave them smelling like roses, but deliver a most devastating blow to the integrity of South Africans, in particular, South African Paratroopers. Why?

Cassinga was a legitimate military target. SWAPO, expecting an attack, deliberately failed to vacate the civilians from the base. Civilians caught in cross fire, were killed or wounded. There was no deliberate killing (massacre) of civilians by the Paratroopers. I experienced no attempt by the SADF or the Government to prevent us from speaking about the details of the operation. Neither did you during your research find any evidence of such an attempt.

All the evidence presented or collected from the SA side were verifiable and proofed to be correct. There were no material contradictions. All the evidence presented or collected from SWAPO sources, you proofed to be inaccurate, contradictory by nature and because of the lack of formal documentary evidence, not verifiable. Your research has produced lots of evidence that Cassinga was a military camp used by SWAPO. Yet in your thesis, SA Paratroopers are portrayed as incompetent and killers of women and children. In my opinion, you as a fellow paratrooper have failed us by choosing not to reflect SWAPO in any negative manner.

In spite of all the things that went wrong, the attack was a success. The biggest failure being the propaganda component. The nature of battle is such that things inevitably goes wrong and that the ability to successfully overcome the resulting obstacles, is the trademark of a professional fighting unit. This we were!

Still proud to be a Paratrooper!

TOMMIE LAMPRECHT
(CAPTAIN, RETIRED)