

This short story is reproduced from *Shaking Hands with Billy: The Private Memoirs of Anthony Richard Turton*

Crimson Circles in the White Sand

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The incessant whine of the gears blends into the static of the radios as both sets of sound were filtered through the headset inside the helmet. All hatches were closed because of the recent contact, with only the semi-rounded Crew Commander's hatches raised at half-cock, to improve the vision for the commanders. They tentatively moved across the killing field, sweeping their eyes through the narrow slits beneath the hatches, hardly noticing bodies contorted by the violence of their last moments alive, being dragged to a central point by dust-covered soldiers, picking their way carefully through the detritus of war.

The Eland in front – a 60mm mortar reconnaissance vehicle with an oddly shaped round turret and an inadequate excuse of a main weapon protruding at a rude angle from its business end – suddenly had its hatches burst open. The gunner popped his head out and hung from the turret as his Eland passed the grotesquely twisted body of a recently-killed combatant. To everyone's surprise, she was a woman, either caught in the cross-fire, or else a *Mujiba* (to use Rhodesian army jargon) that was providing food and sustenance to the *Gooks* in the field. She lay there, legs sprawled apart in a sea of white sand turned crimson as she leaked her recent-life into the earth of Mother Africa. She had taken a hit in the left shoulder, probably from an HE round, and had been ripped apart in near-surgical fashion, her one breast still intact but the other a tangle of raw meat that was indistinguishable from the rest of what her torso used to be. Examining her remains from the turret as the Eland drove past, the gunner triggered the switch on his chest-piece and whispered into the combat radio network, "Better shag her while she's still warm boys..."

With a dismissive wave of the hand, acknowledging the troops on the ground taking care of the aftermath of contact, they drove past and on to their RV position to replenish ammo, food and fuel and to wait for new orders. Their collective thoughts turned now to warm food and maybe a chance to wash themselves



After a tough operational patrol a combat team moves out from their RV point to a TB for the night. Most ambushes occur at dawn and dusk so vigilance is high.