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Memoirs of Anthony Richard Turton***

Hearts, Minds and Mutiny

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The patrol probed the bush, anticipating fire at any moment. The cut-line was close by and the trackers were looking for *spoor*. The relentless sun reflected mercilessly from the shimmering sands of the exposed earth of the cut-line and the soldiers were hot beneath their soft bush hats, encrusted with a white halo of salt from evaporated sweat of missions long forgotten. The Buffel lurched like a drunken juggernaut as it cut a swathe through the virgin bush. Riding on roads was forbidden because of land mines so the driver selected virgin territory where possible. Improvised explosive devices (IED's) were often rigged in defiles – artificial choke points that forced the vehicles to go through a given position carefully selected as a killing field – so the troops were at a high level of alert whenever the driver lost the right to select his own path forward.

Suddenly a fence blocked the path. Undecided, the driver slowed down momentarily. Out of the bush came a man wildly gesticulating at the patrol. A soldier slips his safety catch, “Off” and raises his rifle while the Section Leader deliberates for a split second. “Ride the fence flat”, comes his orders to the driver.

The frantic man gesticulates even harder and shouts to attract the attention of the patrol. More safety catches silently slide to “Off” as rifles come to the ready, anticipating action. A soldier chambers a ballistic round and slips a rifle grenade over his flash hider in expectation. A bead of sweat escapes the Section Leader's bush hat, slowly meandering across the dust of his young face, obeying gravity.

Hesitating, the driver stops before colliding with the fence. “Hold fire”, comes the Section Leader's reassuring voice. “The man is not armed”. The gesticulating man, keen to protect his Mahangu crop from marauding cattle, comes alongside, staring unwaveringly into the barrels of an entire section's rifles, grenade and all. Hearts race because everyone knows if you are not moving you are a target. The man pleads with the Section Leader to use the nearby gate rather than ride the fence down. But this is contrary to standard operational procedures (SOP's). No defiles are to be used if an alternative is available, and here clearly is an alternative. “Ride the fence flat and proceed”, urges a silent voice in the Section Leader's head. For a few seconds the safety of an entire section of infantry weighs in the balance deeply embedded in the head of the Section Leader, too young to legally drive a motor car on the highway back home, but old enough to make life and death decisions like these. Compassion tugs at his heart as the man pleads for his fence. The thin wire is all that protects his crop and thus sustains his family in harsh times like these. The Section Leader orders his men off the vehicle into defensive positions, sending two ahead to probe the defile with bayonets, gingerly penetrating the soft earth of the road at an angle, searching for the tell-tale sign of something hard. The soldiers curse silently under their breath, muttering that the Section Leader has gone soft on *Gooks* and is placing the lives of his men at risk.

The defile is declared clear and the Buffel passes safely through with only the driver on board. The men climb back into the Buffel, cursing the Section Leader. “Why the

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f*** did you not simply ride the fence down?" Mutiny is in the air. "It is all about hearts and minds," comes the calm reply. "Proceed as before..."



This photo shows a brief leisure break during an operational patrol. These breaks are needed to wake the soldiers up because in many cases their view of the outside world is severely restricted by the hardware that protects them.



This image shows the confines of a turret in an Eland 90 where space is at a premium. Note the periscope in front of the gunner's hatch – his entire world is visible through that narrow instrument when hatches are closed.