

# Green Leader: Operation Gatling The Rhodesian Military S Response To The Viscount Tragedy

## Prelude to Operation Gatling: The Viscount Tragedy

On September 3, 1978, Air Rhodesia Flight 825, a Vickers Viscount turboprop airliner, was shot down near Kariba, Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe), by Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) guerrillas. The plane disintegrated in mid-air, killing all 56 passengers and crew. The victims included civilians, medical personnel, and two Catholic bishops.

The Viscount tragedy sent shockwaves through Rhodesia and beyond. It was the deadliest act of terrorism in the country's history and marked a significant escalation in the Rhodesian Bush War. In response, the Rhodesian government launched a ruthless military operation known as Operation Gatling.

## Military Objectives of Operation Gatling

Operation Gatling had two primary objectives:



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- Retaliate against ZANLA for the Viscount tragedy
- Clear terrorist-infested areas along the Kariba-Chirundu road

The operation was tasked with destroying ZANLA bases, ambushes, and supply lines. It also aimed to disrupt guerrilla movements and instill fear among the local population.

### **Planning and Execution of Operation Gatling**

Operation Gatling was meticulously planned by the Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF). The operation involved a combined force of the Rhodesian Army, Air Force, and Rhodesian Special Air Service (SAS).

The operation commenced on September 9, 1978, with the Rhodesian Air Force bombing suspected ZANLA hideouts. Ground forces, including the SAS, were then deployed to conduct search-and-destroy missions along the Kariba-Chirundu road.

The RSF faced fierce resistance from ZANLA guerrillas. The terrain, characterized by thick bush and dense vegetation, provided cover for the insurgents. Heavy rainfall also hampered military operations.

### **Controversy and Alleged Atrocities**

Operation Gatling was highly controversial due to allegations of atrocities committed by Rhodesian forces. Zimbabwean authorities and international

observers accused the RSF of indiscriminate killings of civilians, torture, and arbitrary arrests.

The Rhodesian government denied these allegations, claiming that the RSF operated within the rules of warfare. However, evidence gathered by human rights organizations and journalists suggested otherwise.

### **Consequences and Legacy of Operation Gatling**

Operation Gatling achieved its military objectives, but it came at a significant cost. The operation killed hundreds of ZANLA guerrillas and destroyed their bases. It also disrupted guerrilla movements and sowed fear among the local population.

However, the controversy surrounding Operation Gatling further polarized Rhodesian society and fueled international condemnation. The operation's alleged atrocities tarnished the reputation of the RSF and contributed to the growing international pressure on Rhodesia.

Operation Gatling was a complex and controversial military operation that marked a turning point in the Rhodesian Bush War. It achieved its military objectives but also triggered widespread allegations of atrocities. These allegations continue to cast a shadow over the legacy of Operation Gatling and the Rhodesian Security Forces.

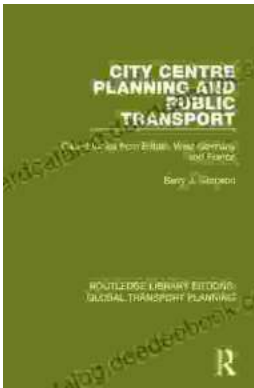
The Viscount tragedy remains a tragic reminder of the brutality of the Rhodesian conflict. Operation Gatling, while intended as a response to terrorism, ultimately became a symbol of the violence and human rights abuses that characterized the Rhodesian era.



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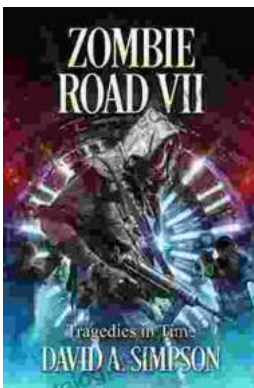
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