



## THE LOSS OF FRED ZEELIE

“..... On returning to Oudtshoorn at the end of March 1974 I went on course until the end of May, after which we were deployed back to Doppies to start preparing sabre’s for a upcoming Op.

Intelligence had said that a large number of SWAPO had crossed into Angola, we were to patrol the South Eastern part of Angola to try and find them. As far as I can recall the following were part of the ops, JD Breytenbach, Trevor Floyd, Koos Moorcroft, Kenaas Conradie John More, Marius Viljoen, Dewald de Beer, Anton Retief, Nella Nel, Chris Hillebrand, one or two Bushmen and myself.

Approximately half way through June we deployed with 4 sabre’s into Angola. Late one afternoon (about 17:00) we were traveling along a foot path when Dewald, who was sitting on top of the lead sabre’s bonnet looking for tracks, shouted for the convoy to stop. He had seen tracks crossing the path, when asked by Cmdt JD “how fresh?” he stated that they were very fresh as the sand was still falling back.

We dismounted and started a sweep on the left side of the vehicles, ( I recall that Koos and Trevor opened the bonnet of the lead sabre as Trevor wanted to look at something). As we moved forward we started finding SWAPO kit stashed away under trees, I think we found about 10 to 12 sets.

These we took back to the sabres and started to sweep to the right side of the vehicles. Fred Zeelie and Chris Hillebrand were on the left of the line abreast sweep formation. All of a sudden we received an immense amount of fire from the front, I ( and I’m sure that the rest of us) hit the ground and returned fire. The enemy’s fire was at that stage so intense that I was covered in dust and could not see much. Koos and Trevor immediately began to give us covering fire with the vehicles machine guns.

The contact did not seem to last too long. The enemy had broken contact and ran, it was then that Chris called for Marius Viljoen, who was the medic. Shortly after the contact we were told that Fred had been killed, it was discovered that a round had hit his rifle magazine and ricocheted into his body and mortally wounding him. Because of this casualty and the fact that light was fading we could not follow up on the tracks. We could only casevac the body by chopper the next day.

The next morning we established that some machine guns had open up on the left flank pinning down Fred. Fred had jumped up and charged the enemy to relieve the fire on Chris. Fortunately (and sadly) this was the only casualty of this contact.

The patrol continued, but did not find these “terrs” again. I think that they had gone back across the Zambezi back into Zambia. Fred was the first “Recce” to be killed in action, as well as the first SA soldier.....”

**Extract of the Diaries of James Oberholzer - Mar 2018**