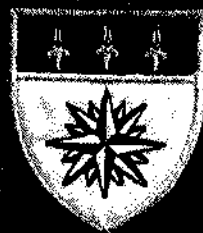


DANIEL ROXO

The Phantom of the Forest



STEPHEN
DUNKLEY

CHAPTER 9

Daniel goes to war

14 October 1975 – 23 August 1976

"Only the dead see the end of war" -

Plato

Sergeant Daniel Roxo joined the fledgling 32 Battalion, then known as Battle Group Bravo in mid-October 1975 where he was used by Commandant Breytenbach to assist in training FNLA troops. Daniel together with 11 other instructors amongst them José, Mourão, Ponciano and Carlos were to become known as the "Dirty Dozen". There have been several excellent books written on the formation and early days as well as the history of 32 Battalion, four by Colonel Jan Breytenbach "Forged in battle", "They Live by the sword", "Buffalo soldiers" and "The tempered sword". Other books on the subject are "32 Battalion the inside story of South Africa's elite fighting unit" and "The Terrible Ones" both penned by Piet Nortje. Other books are the revised and updated version "Borderstrike" by Willem Steenkamp, as well as the book "Buffalo Battalion" by Louis J Bothma. I have used the information in these books together with information from various sources to put together Daniel's movements as best I can during this period of his life.

Many Portuguese people are not aware of Daniel's contribution to South Africa or the South African Defence Force during its intervention in the Angolan war as well as its aftermath and while this association was brief due to his untimely death on 23 August 1976, Daniel was to become one of the legendary members of 1 Recce as well as 32 Battalion just as he had been a legend in Mozambique.

Before we look at the Intervention in Angola by South Africa as well as Daniels specific involvement in Operation Savannah (23 October 1975 – 27 March 1976) or "Operation Carlota" as it was named by the

Cubans as well as subsequent operations until his death in August 1976, it is important to look at the reason/s why South Africa became involved in Angola at all, at the time extraordinary considering that John Vorster and the South African Government seemed to have accepted that Mozambique was under control of a Marxist Government and that Rhodesia would also eventually be run by at the very least by the Rhodesian front and moderate black political parties. The principle of non – interference, that had been rigidly applied to Mozambique during the September coup attempt in 1974 as well as the rest of Africa over the years, was abandoned with regards to Angola. So why did South Africa become involved in the affairs of Angola? The short answer to that question is the following.

1975 was not a particularly good year for the West. Saigon and Phnom Penh fell into Communist hands and in Western Africa the Soviets made a sudden about face in backing the new Ethiopian government over their Somali allies, soon after the dictators of African countries such as, the Peoples Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Tanzania and Guinea where also declaring themselves loyal supporters of Moscow and at the same time gave the Russians a support base that could enable them to conquer the "Dark Continent" and all its riches.

The Americans with its then President Jimmy Carter were reeling from Vietnam and did not want to be drawn in to any foreign military venture, despite indications of Russian expansion across the globe and Africa in particular. In 1975 the West also relied heavily on the Middle East for its oil requirements, but with the Suez Canal being closed because of the six – day war or because it was becoming too narrow for the size of modern day oil tankers, this traffic had to go round the Cape of Good Hope. The Soviets and their allies had almost full control of the air and water routes and if South Africa was to have fallen the strategic and economic advantages would have been invaluable to the Soviets. To achieve the takeover of South Africa and with it the ability to control the policies of Europe and preside over its destiny a major obstacle stood in Brechnev's and the Soviets way, that being Angola and its capital, Luanda.

In one of its first moves their allies, the military wing FAPLA secured the Luanda harbour so that the first ship "Vietnam Heroica" from Cuba could dock without hindrance. Those first Cuban advisors "barbudos/bearded ones" were to play a significant role in future Angolan military affairs. This was the start of thousands and thousands of tons of Soviet equipment arriving in Angola and soon the MPLA had beaten back the lightly equipped FNLA and UNITA. Henry Kissinger urged South Africa to assist Holden Roberto and Jonas Savimbi and while the Americans could not give overt assistance they would pump in \$40 000 000 dollars of arms and equipment covertly to the FNLA and UNITA, as a matter of interest it is estimated the Russians pumped 10 times that amount to the MPLA over the same period.

I have heard the Cubans called "Russia's Gurkhas", as it may have been Russia pouring in the military hardware but it was Cuba that would be bearing the brunt of the fighting in Angola and while the Russians and the Cubans wanted the povo to believe that theirs was an ideological crusade against Colonialism and Capitalism the real reason for Russia to stick its nose in Angola's affairs was for diamonds, oil, minerals and naval bases. It was against this background that the Americans as well as moderate African states begged South Africa to get involved in Angola's affairs to offset this Communist expansion. South Africa suddenly found itself reluctantly embroiled in the military affairs of Angola.

Most of the information that I have about Daniel from joining Bravo group until his death has been gleaned either from the books previously mentioned as well as other material available about Operation Savannah. I was also able to get some information from personal accounts which has also been useful and while some of the information is not what I wanted to hear about Daniel I took the advice of an esteemed author, news correspondent and friend, and decided that I needed to be as objective as possible so as to give his story credibility.

Daniel joined Commandant Breytenbach as a Sergeant just prior to Battle Group Bravo setting off from Calai on 14 October 1975. Bravo's first action of Operation Savannah was on 17 October when the lead company were ambushed by UNITA at Cuvelai. After forming an

assault line the ambushers fled into the bush. The fact that the FNLA and UNITA were supposed to be on the same side had obviously not reached all of Savimbi's or Roberto's men in the field.

The rest of Bravo group were brought to the town and Daniel informed Commandant Breytenbach that there was another UNITA headquarters about 10 kilometres away. Daniel was tasked to take some men and destroy the post. Daniel would have been involved in contacts at Mupa that saw Bravos first casualty of war.

Less than a week after leaving Calai, Bravo linked up with Battle Group Alpha to assault Pereira d' Eça. Bravo's task was to attack from the North and secure the airfield some eight kilometres to the West of the town. Daniel's Company was held in reserve until needed.

On 21 October Bravo Group proceeded to João de Almeida and as they neared the town they were ambushed by a small group of the enemy who fled soon after the initial contact. By late afternoon the town was secured. On 23 October Bravo moved out towards Sá da Bandeira leaving a platoon of FNLA under the command of Daniel to prevent any enemy advance from the rear.

Not much is known about Daniel's movements after being left to defend João de Almeida however he was involved in an incident in Lobito as described in Buffalo Soldiers:

"I despatched Sergeant Danny Roxo and a platoon back to Lobito to secure the dockyard area and the fuel storage tanks, Later I returned to our laagering area to find a highly irate Danny Roxo waiting for me. He had returned with his platoon from the fuel tanks in Lobito. He had been thoroughly beaten up. His platoon had been followed into Lobito by a group of UNITA troops commanded by a fellow called 'Lumumba'. A war name that meant only one thing, he was not a friend of FNLA nor of the South Africans. Lumumba peremptorily ordered Danny to vacate the dockyard. Danny rightly objected, saying he took only orders from his commander. Lumumba would have to discuss the matter with me. He replied that he would only speak with me if he

needed to buy a pocket of tomatoes. Danny lost his temper and obviously made some unflattering remarks about UNITA. Lumumba retaliated by ordering his troops to beat up Danny and a few of the men with him".

Bravo Group and Daniel proceeded from Lobito to Novo Redondo seeing little or no action due to FAPLA troops, survivors of heavy fighting in Benguela and the rapid evacuation of Lobito heading north as fast as they could. Security was however tightened just in case some of them regained their courage and decided to mount an ambush. After Novo Redondo had been taken, and after a brief rest Battle Group Bravo headed towards Porto Amboim where they met heavy resistance from FAPLA, something not experienced since leaving Calais. Unable to cross the Queve river Bravo made its way back to Novo Redondo and Daniel was sent out with one of two patrols to locate Battle group Alpha, after a couple of days Battle Group Alpha and the two patrols entered Novo Redondo. Attempts to bypass the Queve River proved very difficult and it was decided that Bravo group would head north to Cela.

The following is an account by a young national serviceman who crossed paths with Daniel in late 1975 most likely just prior to his exploits at bridge 14:

"It was one morning near to Mussembe about 10 kms from Bridge 14 in Angola and it was late November 1975, my unit was 1 Special Service Battalion and I was in charge of the support group with 12mm Browning machine guns to protect and guard the forward HQ. One of my troops had a shyness problem and as there were no toilets to use and one had to either dig a hole or go behind a bush, this troop asked me if I would go with him to a group of trees about 100 meters from the road. So we took our FN rifles and walked to the trees where the troop went behind a tree and started to dig a hole. While he was busy I lit up a "Popularises" cigarette (Cuban) and I do not know how to explain this but I was looking at the bush in front of me and I could swear that I could see the shape of a body lying there.

My heart nearly came out of my throat, if you know me you will understand what I did next. I was a boxer and a street fighter who only knew to attack first and this is what I did. I ran into the bush with my rifle butt and hit the shit out of not one but three MPLA soldiers who had been hiding there and lucky for me my troop did not get a fright and open fire on us. We took the three soldiers to our HQ where our Commandant was having a briefing with the Recces who had just come in from a patrol and it was one of these men who told me to take the three prisoners to a barn situated a few meters from the HQ office. This we did and four Recces came to the barn, three of them Portuguese and a South African Lt. The one Portuguese man, who I was to learn was called Daniel asked me to show him where we had found the three men, this I did and together with a black Recce they searched the area for maps, books or any info that they may have left lying around.

We then returned to the barn where the three prisoners were being guarded I saw two had been tied up in a crouching position and the other had a rope around his neck and was hanging from a rafter with his toes just touching the ground. The one that was hanging from the rope was an officer of some sorts but even after a few hours of this treatment he was not talking and even I had to admire him for being brave. Roxo took out his pistol and without warning shot him through the head and it worked because the other two prisoners decided to show us where they had hidden maps and diaries. They were also made to carry the officer's body to about 200 meters from where I had found them and ordered to dig a hole. I have never seen so much fear in the two who were alive and digging the hole, it was like they knew they were going to die.

It was so quick when it happened Daniel said something in Portuguese to the two other Recces with him (possibly José and Ponciano) and two shots rang out in the head of both of them. One fell over dead but the other first did a dance and then fell over. We put all 3 in the hole and covered it. It all happened so quick that my troops and I could not talk about it and when we did

the reality of war sunk in "people die in war" Over the next few weeks I would see Daniel coming and going but we never talked again. We were in awe of these men who took no shit from anyone. They did not stay in camp at night but would move in and out like thieves in the night.

My troops who did guard duty as well as myself could never work out where and how they came into camp and we had heard rumours that they were staying in a nearby mansion that had been owned by the governor of the area, after about two weeks I heard that Daniel and his troops had been ambushed and that nobody knew where they were, but he had managed to get him and his men back and when he did arrive at camp everybody that was somebody was around him.

I heard at the time that he had personally killed 20 of the enemy and had saved his men. Soon after that I went to a briefing and Roxo as well as a few South African Officers were having an argument about an attack plan, soon after he left the camp and that was the last I saw or heard of him again".

It was not long after this that Daniel was to win the *Honoris Crux*. So it's perhaps pertinent to look at this phase of his life. Many believe that Daniel won this award during the Battle for Bridge 14; this is not so it was the lead up to the actual battle as you will see.

After more than 80 men of Charlie Company Bravo Group were killed following an ambush by Cubans at Ebo with the wounded being cold bloodily executed where they lay. After the South African forces had retreated from Ebo it was decided to try and bypass the town using an outflanking manoeuvre. This plan however had to be aborted due to UNITA troops hastily leaving the battle zone every time the Stalin organs opened fire. It was decided that the South Africans would have to cross the Nhia River over a small but well-constructed bridge behind a hill code-named Top Hat.

Due to the fact that the bridge could not be seen from the South Africans positions, Commandant Breytenbach was given orders on 27

November to send out a patrol to ascertain if the bridge was in fact still intact. Daniel was tasked by Commandant Breytenbach to reconnoitre the bridge as well as to see if FAPLA were dug in on the far side of the river. Unknown to the South Africans FAPLA were occupying Top Hat.

Daniel with a platoon of infantry as well as 2 armoured cars set out to reconnoitre the area. Not too long after Daniel and his men had moved out the distinct sounds of a contact could be heard by those in the rear. Hearing the battle intensify Commandant Breytenbach ordered additional armoured cars to go Daniel's assistance, but due to the intensity of the contact they respectively declined. Daniel and his men made it back after hitching a ride on the two armoured cars that unlike those who had refused to go and assist had stayed at the scene of the fight.

In the words of Col Breytenbach:

"Danny's story was remarkable, he arrived with his patrol at Top Hat where he decided to leave all his men and the cars, while he went ahead on foot, on his own, to reconnoiter the bridge. Unbeknown to him, he passed through a very strong FAPLA position on Top Hat's slope from where they watched Danny with eager and expectant eyes as he marched his solitary way to his doom at the bridge.

Danny turned the corner, at the bridge, saw that it was blown and also that there were three Cubans standing around what appeared to be a 14.5mm anti-aircraft gun on the far side of the river. He promptly shot two of them after which all hell broke loose as all sorts of weapons opened up on him from the far side.

So he decided to beat a hasty retreat back to his patrol, along the same route that he had come. He ran slap bang into the FAPLA on the slopes of Top Hat who had a glorious view of a speeding little man thumping the tar road within metres of their positions. They opened up with relish but somehow it did not quite work out the way they had planned".

Danny told me the story in his own inimitable Portuguese way. "Coronel I run and go tat tat tat – and I run and I go tat tat tat – and I run and go tat tat tat – and suddenly the shooting it stops; no more FAPLA" he smiled from ear to ear. Danny claimed to have shot two Cubans. He did not claim more. But as luck would have it, FAPLA on Top Hat had caught 2 of Daniel's men when they tried to round up some cattle while Danny was on his way to the bridge.

Both were kept separately as prisoners at Catofe, one by Cubans and the other by FAPLA and both escaped separately within a two day interval between the escapes. While we debriefed them it transpired that Danny had shot a total of eleven, 2 Cubans and nine FAPLA, the latter while dashing through the ambush on Top Hat. Danny was evidently the talk of the town in Catofe and both escapees overheard the troops discussing the incident while they were having a booze up the night after it happened".

Information that has recently come to light after I posted a picture of Top Hat and information regards Daniels actions that led to his Citation for a *Honoris Crux*, has thrown some uncertainty on the above story as it is very probable that the actions for which Daniel was awarded his *Honoris Crux* in fact did not take place on or near Top Hat, but on or at a prominence South of and nearer to bridge 14. Top Hat is North West and a fair distance from Bridge 14 it was most likely a mountain called Hippo Hill which is closer to and south of Bridge 14.

Unfortunately I have been unable to verify this new information due to publishing pressures but I will definitely be researching this information further so that a clearer understanding of Daniels actions over that specific time period can be established and future editions of the book will be updated accordingly.

Whether or not the action was at Top Hat or Hippo Hill, it was for this action against FAPLA that Daniel was recommended for and later awarded the *Honoris Crux*, Daniel became the first non-South African to win South Africa's highest award a medal he was never to receive due to his untimely death in August 1976. While Daniel was the first

non-South African to be awarded the HC he was not the first to be nominated, this honour goes to José "Robbie" Ribeiro for actions at Sa da Bandeira airfield during operation Savannah. It's been said the reason he was not awarded the HC was because he was a Mullato, a decision that Commandant Breytenbach did not agree with and tried unsuccessfully to overturn.

Daniels citation reads:

"Staff Sergeant Paulo distinguished himself with an act of bravery that put his life in danger in the operational area. During November 1975 Staff Sergeant Paulo led a reconnaissance platoon to a destroyed bridge in the operational area. He left his men behind and went forward by himself to undertake the reconnaissance. He was attacked by the enemy but despite the heavy fire laid down by the enemy he was able to fight his way out of the ambush and in the process killed 11 enemy.

This fearless and brave action of S/Sergeant Paulo despite of his life being in grave danger speaks volumes of why he deserves to receive the Honoris Crux".

It is dated 6/8/1976 and signed by General Magnus Malan.

A lesser known fact about the above incident is that after Daniel had fought his way back to where he had left his men prior to his one man reconnaissance, he saw that a recovery crew were busy repairing a Eland armoured car and Daniel decided that he and his men would stand guard while they were completing their work to protect them from any enemy advances. One of the men present that day recalled and confirmed the incident and also stated *"I will always remember him as a brave soldier and I will always be grateful to him and I am very honoured to have had the privilege to have met him in person".*

By early December after nearly two months of continuous combat the men from Bravo group were tired and some very ill with malaria. On 11 December one month after Angola became "independent" Commandant Breytenbach brought his men south and along the way

troops were allowed to go home. The rest of the troops were dropped off at Cuanga and Calai and told that they should visit their families and that they were to return in mid-January when retraining would commence. Daniel, José and Ponciano were also given leave and I can only assume that they took the chance to visit South Africa with Daniel visiting family in Pretoria.

After Daniel, Ponciano and José had returned from leave in 1976 they were the only members qualified to serve in the leader group. Ponciano and José were sent to Mpupa to start training FNLA troops that had mustered there after coming back from leave while Daniel was sent to a refugee camp at Calai that was starting to burst at the seams to recruit able-bodied FNLA supporters who were willing to fight.

By the end of February 1976 all South African Defence Force forces had been withdrawn from Angola after operation Savannah leaving only groups of leaderless FNLA troops from Bravo Group to try and keep FAPLA out of the Cuando Cubango province. With the possibility that FAPLA would push the FNLA out Commandant Breytenbach requested additional leader group members to assist in consolidating all available manpower?

As a stopgap a company of trained men under the command of Daniel with Ponciano and José to assist, were deployed at Vila Nova da Armada to ensure that FAPLA's advance was halted. Other Special Forces members took command of FNLA troops at Savate. A short while after Warrant officer Willy Ward was sent to Vila Nova da Armada to relieve Daniel who then went further north to Baxia Longa to take command of any FNLA troops he could find there.

In mid-February FAPLA captured Serpa Pinto and continued their advance south. The South African led FNLA groups were ordered to pull back towards South Africa with Daniel being tasked to set up defensive positions on the outskirts of the town. Daniel held this position till mid-March when he was paid a visit by Commandant Breytenbach who found Daniel and his men billeted in buildings in the town and he ordered them to withdraw back to the bush.

Soon after Commandant Breytenbach left the town came under attack and it was assumed by the South Africans that it was FAPLA. Willy Ward and some of his men were deployed between Baxia Longa and Vila Nova da Armada to act as a backstop in the event Daniel and his men had to retreat. While moving to their positions they bumped into Ponciano and some of his men emerging from the bush. Ponciano informed Willy that Daniel and his company had in fact been pushed out of Baxia Longa and had been bomb shelled into the bush.

A search party was sent out to locate Daniel and his men who in turn ran into a combined UNITA and mercenary force that were overpowered by the South Africans, it was then ascertained that it had been UNITA and not FAPLA that had attacked Baixa Longa. Some 70 UNITA and 13 French mercenaries were taken prisoner and a large quantity of vehicles as well as arms and ammunition was captured. Daniel and his men had also been located. Daniel and his men together with José and Ponciano as well as other members of the South African Special Forces were deployed at Vila Nova da Armada to defend the town against FAPLA.

On 22 March 1975 Commandant Breytenbach was authorised to relocate trained members of Bravo Group to Pica Pau – (*Portuguese for Woodpecker*) situated on the East bank of the Kavango River. The move was completed by 27 March and this is generally accepted as the date Bravo Group became the SADF's newest unit 32 Battalion.

Small groups of FNLA troops were wandering around Mavinga and Luenge to the East of Vila Nova da Armada and in early April Daniel, José and Ponciano were again sent to contact these leaderless groups and instructed to patrol the terrain as far North as Mavinga. By mid-April they received supplies from Rundu as well as a Lieutenant Joubert who sent José to Luenge with 34 black troops. He also deployed Daniel and Ponciano with five white Portuguese and 82 black troops to protect two bridges that cross the Lutungando River, some 40 kilometres north of Luenge.

In early June Lieutenant Joubert was relieved by 2nd Lieutenant Peter Miles and together with Daniel and his men managed to clear FAPLA

out of Mavinga. Miles left Daniel in charge at Mavinga with Miles and his company heading north towards Cunjaba. It was here that Miles and 9 of his men were separated from the rest of his company when they ran into a FAPLA advance and the Unimog they were travelling in was destroyed. Hearing the gunfire Miles's company concluded that Miles and the others had been either killed or captured by FAPLA.

A black Non Commissioned Officer took command and decided that they would make a stand against FAPLA and found themselves surrounded and outnumbered by a far superior force. Commandant Breytenbach due to Cunjaba being 320 kilometres inside Angola was unable to send in air support to assist his men so he ordered the Sergeant to try and break through the FAPLA lines and head for Mavinga and link up with Daniel. The men did manage to make it back to Mavinga and after being debriefed by Daniel he and his men set out to see what had happened to Miles and the other missing men.

After a couple of days of searching, Daniel reports to Commandant Breytenbach that Miles and his men had managed to evade FAPLA but it seemed likely that they had been taken prisoner and could possibly be on their way to Luanda. Daniel was surprised when two days later Miles and six of his men (three had been killed in skirmishes with FAPLA) arrived in Mavinga after a 60 kilometre walk.

Commandant Breytenbach then decided to post Clive Sargeant at Luengue who when he arrived was instructed by a newly arrived Citizen Force Paratrooper captain to link up with Daniel at Mavinga. Just as Clive was about to set out for Mavinga Daniel who had on his own accord kept up regular patrols to the north of Cunjaba reported that he was being attacked by planes and that FAPLA were advancing on Luengue. When the Captain reported this development to Task Force headquarters he was ordered to avoid any contact with the enemy and to withdraw to South West Africa.

Fortunately Daniel had no casualties and was instructed to link up with Clive at Luengue and form a rear-guard allowing the captain to withdraw to Coutada do Mucusso. Commandant Breytenbach also ordered the captain to mine the road between Mavinga and Luengue as

well as the airfield at Luengue, unknown to the Captain or Daniel FAPLA had managed to slip in a strong patrol to his rear.

Daniel warned the captain to keep the convoy off the roads so not to be ambushed. The convoy comprising of 6 vehicles left Luengue using the main roads, either on 16 or 19 August around 8 am and 15 kilometres from Luengue they ran into a well-placed ambush. The lead vehicle driven by Lance Corporal C.A.C.P Ribeiro was hit by an RPG rocket and due to the fact that the vehicle was transporting plastic explosives, blew the vehicle to pieces and badly damaged two others directly behind it.

The Captain who was following to the rear of the convoy is said to have retreated south, leaving the survivors who had not run to look after themselves, some heading back to Luengue while others headed for Dirico.

Daniel and Ponciano on hearing the explosions from the ambush sent two trusted and good Angolan born Portuguese soldiers Tony and Frans (possible pseudonyms) to take a Unimog and go see if they could assist the captain and his men. They managed to find a few survivors who had fled into the bush and bring them back to Luengue. Daniel and Clive took control of this situation and managed to re-establish a semblance of control over the survivors, some who had stood their ground although a good number of men had fled into the bush.

Daniel then led the survivors through the bush using a hunting trail that was indicated on an old map, this allowed the vehicles to keep off any main roads and away from any further possible ambushes. The survivors headed for Woodpecker. Clive Sargeant indicated to me the following:

"I believe that had Danny not led us through the bush in the manner that he did, then we probably would not have arrived unscathed – we would certainly have taken a chance on the main road and probably been ambushed or attacked again, he tended to be cautious preferring to move slowly rather than rushing in".

After Daniel had reported the Captain's actions to Commandant Breytenbach and apparently expressed his disgust at his lack of courage as well as his leadership abilities, a furious Commandant Breytenbach then ordered the Captain to return to the scene of the attack to search for any survivors and destroy the bridge at Dirico to slow down the advance of FAPLA as this would be a natural objective for FAPLA in their move Southwards.

Daniel over a few beers in the pub had discussed Commandant Breytenbach's orders with José, Ponciano and Clive and had indicated that instead of driving to the bridge with the Captain in command he believed that taking a small group by helicopter would achieve the objective and be safer. From that conversation it's obvious that Daniel had no confidence in the Citizen Force Captain.

The next day the Captain departed with the remnants of his company, but instead of travelling in formation as a mutually supporting fighting force, the column was allowed to become strung out over many kilometres, with the Captain in his command vehicle at the rear of the convoy. Daniel, Ponciano and José with a squad of FNLA troops had been tasked with reconnoitring the way ahead and to blow up the bridge at Dirico as ordered by Colonel Breytenbach.

Near to Macunde on the North bank of the Okavango river, the Wolf (*mine resistant Unimog*) that they were travelling in detonated a heavily boosted anti-tank mine that threw the vehicle into the air causing it to come crashing down on its side. Firing that had started from the side of the road was suppressed by José and other survivors of the ambush.

Amongst the casualties were Ponciano, who was critically injured and Daniel who was pinned to the ground from the waist by the Wolf. I believe that an attempt was made to try and lift the vehicle off Daniel, but as can be imagined due to its weight as well as the survivors coming under fire this proved extremely difficult.

While I have not seen any medical reports nor been able to personally speak to a single person who was at the scene at the time of Daniel's death and with the extent of his internal injuries, it is doubtful that this

action, if successful would have helped to save Daniel's life. Both Daniel and Ponciano were made as comfortable as possible under the circumstances and due to the fact that the radio had been damaged, José made the decision to run back down the road to get assistance from the rest of the column, who one would think had heard the explosion and subsequent small arms fire.

It is alleged that when the Captain was given a situation report by José, he then ordered the column to turn back for Woodpecker base for help, thus as many believe effectively deserting Daniel, Ponciano and the others to save his own skin. While this was happening legend has it that Daniel apparently asked for a "*Lucky strike*" cigarette and when he had finished smoking it died, it is said that the whole time that Daniel was pinned under the Wolf he did not once call for assistance even though he must have been in excruciating pain. Altogether six men died in this incident.

When the Captain returned to base and informed the OC of Woodpecker, Charlie Hochhapfel what had occurred, Commandant Breytenbach was immediately informed and he in turn ordered Charlie to arrange a helicopter and have dead and wounded case evacuated at all costs. To make matters worse during this period an Antonov plane had begun circling the ambush site and was dropping bombs from the tailgate, luckily missing the wolf and the immediate area around it. The chopper pilot arriving at the scene with bombs falling from the sky refused to land anywhere near the contact area and would only land some distance away from the ambush site.

Even after the Antonov had left the scene Charlie and the survivors had to struggle through 2-3 kilometres of swamp and reeds several times in a Makoro (dugout canoe) carrying across the dead and the wounded.

While this was happening, a Land Rover driven by Amilcar Queiroz, arrived from Woodpecker and Ponciano having survived his cumbersome evacuation was placed on the back and transported across bumpy fields to the helicopter. Charlie was apparently so disgusted and upset with the chopper pilot that he sent him back to Rundu with an empty chopper. Daniel, Ponciano and the other three

slightly wounded men were then transported by road to Woodpecker. On the way back Ponciano and the wounded were taken to the Andora mission hospital, between Dirico and Woodpecker and here they attempted to save Ponciano's life but he died on the way back to Pica Pau. The mood at Woodpecker as can be expected was sombre when the Land rover arrived back and news of Daniel's and Ponciano's deaths filtered through to the men.

Information I received on the 40th anniversary of Daniel and Ponciano's death from a friend and ex comrade in arms had me thinking how ironic life actually is:

"And to this day I vividly remember a brief conversation in jest in the pub at 1 RR shortly before my friend Soeiros untimely departure. Him, "you should stop smoking my friend, it's going to kill you." Me, "nah that's ok, I'll probably get blown up before that happens" And here I am not blown up or even killed by smoking 40 years later. I guess it is true, only the good die young. RIP brothers. You were men among men Salute".

We can only speculate what would have happened to Ponciano had the column reacted immediately to Josés message, (I believe "Daniel would have died even if the column had rushed to help, due to the extent of his injuries") and rushed to assist their comrades or if the Chopper pilot had landed close to the contact area and assisted in evacuating Ponciano and the wounded out of the area. The week however was to get worse for Bravo Group and the Recce's. On the 25th José was granted permission by Charlie Hochhappel to go home and inform his mother of her youngest son's death. José was also asked to transport a number of wounded men from the ambush to the hospital in Rundu.

Six lightly wounded men from the ambush as well as two national servicemen who had asked for a lift, as well as José climbed into the Land Rover and headed towards Rundu They never made it as he and the other eight passengers died when their vehicle was involved in a fatal accident with an SADF convoy travelling on the same road. The driver of the truck that caused the accident, a Lieutenant was charged and sentenced to four years in jail. The mangled Land Rover was

mounted on oil drums outside of Rundu camp as per instructions from the area Commander as a reminder to all that used the road to drive safe.

The death of Daniel "Paulo" Roxo, José "Robbie" Ribiero, Ponciano "Silva" Soeiro and Carlos "Little Robbie" Ribeiro was a big blow not only for One Reconnaissance Commando and the fledgling 32 Battalion but also for the SADF in general, as within less than a week they had lost four of their top Portuguese speaking operators and with them a wealth of combat experience, especially Daniel who had in a short space of time established himself as a legend among his South African comrades in arms. Major General Loots who was very fond of his Portuguese recruits told me that he had been saddened to hear of their deaths and like many other South African soldiers was devastated by the loss of these men, this period was to become known as "Black August".

The death of Daniel, but not the others, was reported in the press (Rapport; 5 September 1976 by Frik Badenhorst), here is an extract from that newspaper article and that has been translated for those non Afrikaans speaking readers.

"Daniel Roxo (Die Rooie), wat 'n lewende legend en een van die grootste helde van Suider-Afrika se guerrilla - oorloë was, is dood. Op die vooraand van grootskaalse offensiewe teen die MPLA in Angola het hy en twee makers daar in 'n landmynontploffing gesneuwel. Reelings word geteref om sy lyk na Portugal te bring, waar sy vrou en vyf kinders woon sedert die gesin twee jaar gelede uit Mosambiek gevlug het. Roxo wat die Oorlogs kruis, die hoogste militere erkenning van die Portugese magte in Mosambiek vewerf het, was veral bekend vir sy werk met Flecha, die swart elite troepe agter Frelimo se linies in die ou dae".

Translation: "Daniel Roxo. (The Red), who was a living legend and one of the biggest hero's of Southern - Africa's guerrilla wars, is dead. On the eve of a large-scale offensive against the MPLA he and two comrades died in a landmine explosion.

Arrangements are being made to take his body to Portugal where his wife and five children have lived since they fled Mozambique two years ago. Roxo who was awarded the War Cross, the highest military award of the Portuguese in Mozambique was known specifically for his work with the Flecha's (sic), the black elite troops that fought behind FRELIMO lines in the old days".

TV-keel (Lusitania) - BASTON, 17 Oktober 1977

Gelede

SÓ het hy yester. Deur Francisco Roxo se dapperheid het hant in sy laaste oomblikke ook nie versink nie. Hy was saam met twee ander agterop 'n soldate vliegtuig wat in Angola deur 'n landingsveld te lag gebles word. Sy makkers is onwettig dood. Die vliegtuig het agteroor geslaan en Roxo is in die see geryg. Hy het nog gelewe en het om 'n sigaret gepra. Nadat hy dit klaar gerook het, het hy die stenoerant vel en gestoerf. Die vliegtuig van Miasa se verhoor het agtervoortleer in die bosse van Witwatersbakk en Angola.