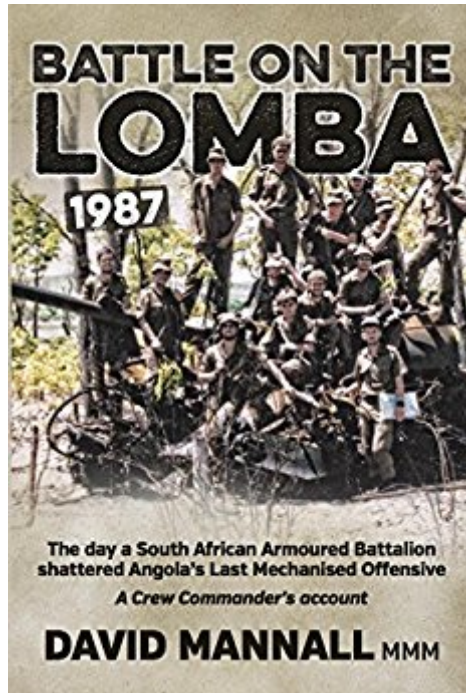




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Battle On The Lomba 1987: Battle On The Lomba 1987



Synopsis

The climactic death-throes of Soviet Communism during the 1980s included a last-gasp attempt at strategic franchise expansion in Southern Africa. Channeled through Castro's Cuba, oil-rich Angolan armed forces (FAPLA) received billions of dollars of advanced weaponry including MiG 23 and Sukhoi fighter jets, SAM 8 missile systems and thousands of armored vehicles. Their intent - to eradicate the US-backed Angolan opposition (UNITA), then push southwards into South Africa's protectorate SWA/Namibia, ostensibly as liberators. 1985 saw the first large-scale mechanized offensive in Southern African history. Russian Generals planned and oversaw the offensive but without properly accounting for the tenacity of UNITA (supported by the South African Defense Forces - SADF) or the treacherous terrain typical in the rainy season. The '85 offensive floundered in the mud and FAPLA returned to their capital Luanda. The South Africans stood down, confident their 'covert' support for UNITA had demonstrated the folly of prosecuting war so far from home against Africa's military Superpower. The South Africans were mistaken. Fidel and FAPLA immediately redoubled their efforts, strengthening fifteen battalions with even more Soviet hardware while Russian and Cuban specialists oversaw troop training. As Cuban and Angola fighter pilots honed their skills over the skies of Northern Angola, David Mannall, a normal 17-year old kid completing High School, was preparing for two years of compulsory military service before beginning Tertiary education. Through a series of fateful twists he found himself leading soldiers in a number of full-scale armored clashes including the largest and most decisive battle on African soil since World War II. This is the David and Goliath story that, due to seismic political changes in the region, has never been truthfully told. The author lifts the hatch on his story of how Charlie Squadron, comprising just twelve 90mm AFVs crewed by 36 national servicemen, as part of the elite 61 Mechanized Battalion, engaged and effectively annihilated the giant FAPLA 47th Armored Brigade in one day - 3 October 1987. Their 90mm cannons were never designed as tank-killers but any assurances that it would never be used against heavy armor were left in the classroom during the three-month operation and never more starkly than the decisive 'Battle on The Lomba River'. The Communist-backed offensive died that day along with hundreds of opposition fighters. 47th Brigade survivors abandoned their remaining equipment, fleeing north across the Lomba, eventually joining the 59th Brigade in what became a full-scale retreat of over ten thousand soldiers to Cuito Cuanavale. ## The myth perpetuated by post-apartheid politicians goes something like this "Ã¢âÂthe SADF force that destroyed 47th Brigade on 3 October numbered 6,000 men and that all the hard yards were run by the long suffering UNITA!" The inconvenient truth is that there were just 36 South African boys on the frontline that day, but it is also true to say they would never have

achieved such a stunning victory without the support of many more. This is their story.

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Customer Reviews

A friend originally from South Africa who fought in Angola against the Cuban Army told me about this book. The author takes you back in time and shares his two years of National Service with you, including 90 days at war in Angola. His unit played a major role in what would later be seen as the most decisive battle of the war. His account from his own recollection and the recollections of his mates gives you a sense of their life, the danger they faced, and the horrors they saw. Little is known in this country of the battle to stop the spread of Communism in Africa. This book will give you an insight into that war, not from a geopolitical point of view, but the view of those unacknowledged fighters putting their lives on the line in that war. Do take the time to read this.

As a former SADF, conscripted recruit in the early 1970s - I also served in the Rhodesian Light Infantry in the Rhodesian bush war in the late 1970s. So David Mannall's personal account of the Battle on the Lomba provides some genuine

familiarity for me but also a riveting insight into one of the bigger, and largely unknown crucial battles that took place in Angola between the South Africans - and the Cuban and Russian backed MPLA of Angola. Out-gunned and against largely superior numbers the small South African armoured units out-maneuvered and blew away the enemy. Maybe 'blew away' is an understatement - actually crucified the enemy is more like it. Superior South African training, discipline, tactics and gunmanship won the day. I was living in Durban at the time (1987), and like most of the S. African public was blissfully unaware of these events that the SA military was facing which could eventually have threatened S. Africa itself. The Russians had poured in over \$ 1 billion (yes \$ 1 billion in the 1980s) worth of equipment, tanks, arms and MiG combat jets in support of 25,000 Cubans and large numbers of the Angolan MPLA and FNLA troops. The Cuban/Russian foray into Angola was proven to be largely a failure. Castro had a senior Cuban general executed for his failure in the advance of the Cuban and MPLA units through southern Angola against the S. Africans. The Battle on the Lomba was an example of this enemy failure. Some typos and grammatical errors here and there in the book but this is insignificant in view of a little known confrontation. A well told and gripping account of this battle from someone there in the thick of armoured conflict that puts the reader there. Well done David. Jeremy Hall (author of Weep for Africa).

Another one of those historical events completely ignored in the US was the Angolan Civil War which lasted for nearly 20 yrs. Roughly it was the Communist MPLA/FAPLA vs the loosely western/SA supported UNITA. Needless to say it is somewhat difficult to get any material on this so anything I find is eagerly picked up. This is the story of an armored unit from South Africa during 'Operation Modular' of the largest armored battle in Africa since WWII, the Battle of Cuito Cuanavala. 4 Brigades of Soviet, East German, and Cuban supported forces including MiG's, T-55 tanks, APC's, and anti-aircraft vs a battalion of South African Ratel IFV's. Written by one of the vehicle commanders, David Mannell, this is a 'soldier's point of view' book and not a history of the entire conflict, just his two years of service focused on his units' actions during the Battle of the Lomba river. Clear, descriptive narration makes this a comfortable and easy read for even those not versed in military jargon. The regular use of 'Afrikaans' is offset by the English definition next to it in parenthesis. I really enjoyed this book not only for the history but also for the writing style. It's hard enough to find information on this area of the world nevermind a book that I actually LIKE to read, not a boring textbook style. 5/5

David Mannall has written an excellent first-person account of a South African Defense Force (SADF) tank commander during Operation Modular (November 1987) against Soviet/Cuban supplied FAPLA units in southern Angola, while allied with Angolan UNITA forces. What the book is really about is the "coming of age" of a young conscript soldier. Mannall begins the book as a recently graduated high school student, and we follow him as he goes through basic training and his induction into the SADF. Then, to his surprise, he's assigned to an armored car unit on the border, which quickly finds itself in combat in southern Angola. What makes this a good book, and part of a genre of first person accounts of war, is the book is told totally from the aspect of an enlisted soldier; his perspective and experiences. Parts of the book account for a young man's off time, alcohol, and, of course, his desire to lose his virginity. But most of the book provides true insight into his army experience in training and, more importantly, in war. At the same time Mannell provides insight into the SADF of the time; its training, organization, and weaponry, from a soldier's perspective. His first person descriptions of what it's like to be in combat, especially in close combat, helps one to understand that to a soldier on the ground, in combat, it's not a neat and organized experience. Fighting in the African bush meant Mannall could only see the vehicles to his left and right, and sometimes not even those. There is confusion and a kill-or-be-killed perspective, while feeling that you're fighting for your friends & you don't want to let them down. Although there's nothing new in these experiences, his perspective is one that bears repeating. These are the experiences of any soldier in combat.

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